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Eldest Daughter or Third Parent? An Exploration of Eldest Daughters in the Egyptian-American Diaspora

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Graduate Studies

Eldest Daughter or Third Parent?
An Exploration of Eldest Daughters in the Egyptian-American Diaspora

A THESIS SUBMITTED BY

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TO THE

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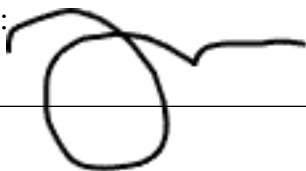*Dr. Martina Rieker*

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I, Fatima Khaled Abdel-Gwad, declare that this thesis titled, "Eldest Daughter or Third Parent? An Exploration of Eldest Daughters in the Egyptian-American Diaspora" and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

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A Thesis submitted by

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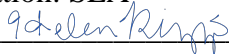Thesis Adviser
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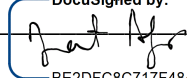
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Abstract

Egyptian-American first-born daughters in the diaspora women cope with the pressures of immigration by improvising processes of identity-making and preserving ethnicity. This group is subject to complex systems of gendered, classed, and racialized tensions that become relevant in their attempts to preserve cultural formations in the diaspora. This work seeks to showcase the various tensions present in diasporic existence and explore the methods with which these diasporic daughters participate in processes of cultural and ethnic preservation. Through the ethnographic accounts of six eldest daughters in the New York City and Northern New Jersey areas, this research explores the connections between these interlocutors and the ways in which they are influenced by affective emotion, participate in re-making ethnicity, and bridge diasporic tensions.

Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Prologue

When I started graduate school at the American University in Cairo back in 2020, I came into my Master's program with the idea of conducting research on what I like to refer to as Hannah Montana syndrome. My concept of Hannah Montana syndrome was something that I would joke about with my friends in college, that was understood and felt by women from a diverse mix of national and ethnic backgrounds, spanning from the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and even Central America. The invisible string tying us together despite our differences in cultural backgrounds, religions, and understandings, was the shared experience of existence in diaspora—and Hannah Montana. This "syndrome" that I spoke about was a phenomenon that many of us had experienced, or rather, unwittingly improvised, to bridge the ability to exercise our own individual autonomies while still seeking to maintain connections to our families and our communities back at home [back home referring to both our communities in our hometowns and the further, more removed idea of back home in our respective homelands which our parents had immigrated from]. We collectively desired to find a way to live autonomous lives within a variety of familial and communal constructs that were not designed to let us as women enjoy any degree of autonomy. Autonomy meant different things to each of us, but the exercising of such autonomy represented a departure from the norms that we had been trained to silently adhere to throughout our lives. The reality of

many of our lives was that participation in any activity that was regarded as being outside of the norm had the potential to cost us our connection to the families and communities with which we felt belonging and could result in a degree of ostracization or punishment in some shape or form. In order to bridge the gap between the exercising of our own freedoms and maintain connections to our families and communities, many of us unwittingly improvised the living of a double life. This is where Hannah Montana becomes relevant. In the Disney Channel show, which we as girls born on the cusp of Generation Z and Millennials had watched growing up, the main character, Hannah Montana, lives a double life in an attempt to maintain and protect her ability to live normally and avoid facing the pressures of fame in her daily life. Much of the plotline of the show reflects on the struggles and pressures that Miley Ray Stewart, a.k.a. Hannah Montana, faces in the process of maintaining the façade of her double life. Like Hannah Montana, many of the women that I joked about Hannah Montana syndrome with similarly faced a constant degree of tension in their daily lives in their attempts to make peace between two often opposing worlds—that of the culture they had been taught at home and in their community, versus that of which we had learned outside our homes in association with the so-called American culture. The improvisation of a double life, despite its volatile presence rooted in tension, allowed many of us the ability to exercise freedoms we would not have otherwise enjoyed. In looking deeper into what I called Hannah Montana syndrome, I became interested in looking deeper into tensions that myself and others in the communities I claim membership with, improvise in the living of our daily lives—those regarding our families, our communities here in the United States, and even our communities back in our home countries. I

wanted to understand the ways in which we as women in the diaspora made sense of living in what often felt like two very different worlds.

In narrowing down the topic for my research, I decided to focus particularly on eldest daughters for two reasons. The first reason had to do with conversations with a number of women I have had the privilege of speaking to and getting to know over the years. As an eldest daughter in an Egyptian American family myself, I had grown up believing that there was not anything particular or common about my experience in adolescence. It was through conversations with women that shared similar backgrounds with my own that I realized there were a number of similarities in our experiences that aligned far too much to have simply been attributed to coincidence. In the same way that my idea of Hannah Montana syndrome was borne of conversations with friends, it was in this fashion that my idea of focusing on the eldest daughter within an immigrant family came to light. In 2019 and 2020, I began to meet more and more young women [some of these women were Egyptian American, while some from other backgrounds] with whom I shared my experiences with, and came to notice a pattern. The common link between these conversations and our experiences was that we all shared the commonality of being the eldest daughter. Above all, I noticed that the traits which seemed to come forward again and again were those of feeling like a second mother, becoming hyper-independent, and being tasked with the responsibility of holding together collective family structures. The distinction of the eldest daughter versus a daughter more generally is important here because while many of the shared experiences I've discussed thus far, and will discuss throughout this research may be shared by daughters more generally, it has become clear that there is a concentration of these experiences among eldest

daughters that is not shared by all daughters. The similarities that I came to notice through conversations with friends and acquaintances was my primary reasoning for choosing to focus on eldest daughters as a research topic. Being the eldest daughter was, and still is, a frequent topic of conversation in my own social circles, where we often psychoanalyze the experiences we had growing up as the daughters of immigrants. Though these conversations, like the ones about Hannah Montana syndrome, were also with friends from a variety of national backgrounds, as I began to meet more Egyptian American women that also happened to be eldest daughters, I noticed a similarity in our experiences that I found was a result of the ways in which our families had immigrated and was affected by markers of class and gender. As this research was born out of jokes and conversations between friends, as well as my own experience, this project is very personal to me as it was inspired by my experience being the eldest daughter in an Egyptian American family.

The second reason I chose to focus specifically on eldest daughters, following my personal experiences and conversations with the women around me, is that I noticed the popularity of discourse on social media regarding the experiences of eldest daughters. Much of the discourse about eldest daughters centered around experiences of childhood trauma and the shared experience of being a second mother within their families to younger siblings. Searching the term "eldest daughter" on TikTok, Twitter, or Instagram will show thousands and thousands of videos, tweets, and posts about the experience of being an eldest daughter in an immigrant family. One of many tweets on the matter reads, "eldest daughters in a brown household, who breed an unhealthy sense of self sufficiency and hyper independence, have mommy issues and swallow fathers rage and spit

it out, with an impending urge to run away and never look back" (maryamful, 2023), reflecting on the experiences of being an eldest daughter in a family of immigrants. One TikTok reads, "pov: you're the eldest daughter, being the third parent, hv to hide your feelings, priorities everyone over yourself, forgive people easily, couldn't enjoy teenage life like others, raised to be independent alone, witnessing everything in the household, need to be strong for the younger siblings" (mirahmerah, 2022). Yet another TikTok reads, "The pain the eldest first gen daughter goes through in seeing their siblings grow up right in front of their eyes, always ensuring the younger siblings were happy and got the opportunities the older sibling never got due to the older child being the guinea pig child" (ang.alexx, 2022). Thousands of social media posts created by eldest daughters that are either immigrants themselves or the daughters of immigrants reflect upon the pressures of being the eldest daughter. The prevalence of social media discourse surrounding this topic is notable and makes it a topic that should be taken seriously by the field of academic and ethnographic research. This trend in popular online discourse points to a clear similarity in experiences between eldest daughters, or at the very least, the indication of a deeper connection to be analyzed. The use of social media has in recent years become one of the primary modalities for young people to participate in online discourse and share their opinions, indicating the usefulness of social media discourse in identifying topics for research [especially regarding the younger generation] that we may not have previously thought of. The popularity of recent discourse on social media regarding the eldest daughter is an opportunity that academic research should jump towards in understanding the realities of not only young women, but the

larger context of diasporic existence and the lives of second-generation children of immigrants.

Finally, I chose to focus on Egyptian American eldest daughters due to my own identification as an Egyptian American eldest daughter, student, and researcher. My identification with the community that I have chosen to research has helped me not only identify the subject of which I am researching, but also lends to my ability to fairly represent the stories of a historically marginalized and underrepresented group. In the United States, both in popular culture and in academic research, Muslim and Arab women have not been allowed the employment of nuance.

The representation that has been established of these communities has revolved around either refuting Islamophobic and Orientalist perceptions of our people(s) or further entrenching those very perceptions. Much of our existence within the American diaspora following 9/11 has been centered around the creation of a defensive identity in which we are forced to define what we are *not* rather than what we *are*. The truth that I see and seek to represent is that Muslim, Arab, and particularly Egyptian women's lives are deserving of nuance, of a middle ground. We should be able to discuss the struggles of our lives without fearing for its use against our respective communities or being regarded as oppressed when read as part of a larger Orientalist framework. I'm hopeful that other women that have felt the way that I have will feel seen in this research. The future should look towards the acceptance that all communities are complicated and deserving of nuance.

There is a world of research waiting to be done on eldest daughters in the various diasporic immigrant communities in which they exist. I'm hopeful that this research may help to open the door to future research on the topic and will help to expand our current understandings of Arab and Egyptian American women in the diaspora.

2. Introduction

To reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one's life were clearly and decisively fixed.

Latifa Al Zayyat, *The Open Door*

When I was eleven years old and about a month into the sixth grade, I got my period for the first time. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this first period would change my life forever. The changes that ensued weren't about bleeding per se, but rather the cultural and social implications of that bleeding; from the onset of that bleeding, I was to become a woman, and I was to bear the social and familial responsibilities of my assigned womanhood. As soon as I told my parents that I started my period, I was informed that I would need to start veiling, due to my religious obligation. Though I didn't fully understand why I had to start veiling and admittedly wasn't very happy about it, I listened to my parents' instructions and eventually grew into the role of being *muhagaba*, or as we call it in the United States, a hijabi.

I bore on my head and throughout my body what I would learn were the heavy expectations of being a visibly Muslim girl. I played my assigned role flawlessly, silently adhering to the bounds of honor and respectability that were prescribed to me by generations before me. As years and seasons of my life passed, I suddenly found myself interrogating my practice of the hijab and my relationship to Islam more generally. What did it mean to veil when I felt that I was performing? Instead of feeling connected to God, I realized with time that my practice of veiling was connected to my fear of other people's perception of me; I felt that I was performing the role of the good Muslim girl, the good Egyptian girl, and the hijab was just part of my costume. As I became increasingly conscious of the degree to which I had been performing, the practice of veiling became suffocating to me in a way that I knew it shouldn't have been. I found myself wanting to find out who I was outside of it. And so I made the decision, after ten years of wearing the hijab full-time, to take it off. This decision scared me for many reasons, the most nauseating of which was the anticipation of my father's reaction to it. But in all my overthinking and anticipating of his reaction, nothing could have actually prepared for it: when I gathered the courage to tell my father of my decision to stop veiling, he asked me if I could just wear something that was hijab-adjacent, and even suggested that I could just wear a baseball cap to cover my hair. "People need to know that you're a Muslim girl," he told me. It was with this request from my father that I realized that the reason he told me to veil so many years ago was not even particularly related to the commandments of God or any particular allegiance towards the idea of modesty, but an allegiance towards defining difference between myself (Muslim, Arab, virgin) and other women (non-Muslim, non-Arab, non-virgin).

This mission of defining the difference between the self and the other, as embodied through my practice of the hijab, is a gendered process of identity-making that makes women the unwitting bearers of cultural and religious preservation. In this research, I seek to elaborate on the process of identity-making and explore the ways in which the self is defined in contrast to the oppositional other. The desire to define the difference between oneself and the other is one of several methods of oft-conflicting forms of identity-making that Egyptian Americans in the diaspora improvise in response to the pressures of immigration. This research is an attempt to explore those processes of gendered identity-making that take place through the bodies of Egyptian-American millennial women.

3. Background

Following the economic liberalization of Egypt, also known as the *Infitah* of late president Anwar Al-Sadaat's Egypt, a considerable number of Egyptians have chosen to emigrate and leave Egypt, often in search of economic or educational opportunities. The move outward that was spurred by the *Infitah* resulted in the creation of Egyptian diasporas worldwide. In the United States, large numbers of Egyptians chose to settle in the New York City and Northern New Jersey area starting in the late 1970s, resulting in the formation of a large Egyptian American diaspora in those areas. The prolonged removal from Egypt that is present in this diasporic existence has facilitated the development of entire communities that are relatively separate from their roots "back home" in Egypt. Despite the rift that

occurs in leaving the homeland, Egyptian Americans participate in various processes of cultural preservation in response to changing socio-political and economic realities. Following 9/11, the increasing racialization of Arab Americans and Muslims in the United States has ramped up pressure to either hold onto (or abandon) cultural and ethnic formations in response to the pressures by the host country.

The creation of Egyptian diasporas in the United States, in particular within the New York City and Northern New Jersey areas, has resulted in a large population of Egyptians residing in and raising their families in these areas. One of the areas that many Egyptians have chosen to gravitate towards is Astoria, a neighborhood in Queens which is home to a large concentration of North African businesses and people. Astoria is home to a neighborhood called Little Egypt, a small community that boasts the colloquial distinction of being regarded as New York City's North African neighborhood. Though not as particularly concentrated of a community as Astoria, Northern New Jersey is also host to large communities of Arabs in diaspora. It is within these neighborhoods which the background of my research emerges.

As large numbers of Egyptians made the decision to leave Egypt and continue life as immigrants in the United States, many settled down and created a generation of second-generation children of immigrants. Though not immigrants themselves, children of immigrants experience a distinct version of diasporic existence that is colored by its existence in tension: second-generation children of immigrants belong neither here nor there, and constantly balance and create hybrid cultural formations that are unique to diasporic existence.

Within these diasporic communities and the category of children of Egyptian American immigrants, daughters of Egyptian American families participate in processes of cultural preservation that are gendered, classed, and racialized. They are affected by not only the pressures of immigration, but also the pressures of patriarchal bounds and gendered normativity.

4. Research Problem and Justification

The problem that this study addresses is a lack of research regarding the ways in which Egyptian American diasporic women cope with the pressures of immigration. This group is subject to complex systems of gendered, classed, and racialized tensions that become relevant in their attempts to preserve cultural formations in the diaspora. In order to address a gap in research regarding Egyptian-American diasporic women, this work seeks to explore the various tensions present in the limited existing literature and complicate dominant understanding(s).

The questions that emerged in the process of my research revolve around gendered aspects of societal control, the creation of ethnicity in the diaspora, as well as diasporic tensions. The overarching framework that I find help in this work is looking towards the tensions that exist within families, communities, and even within the self. The questions that emerged from this framework were, first, what is the role of emotion in affecting and informing social interaction? Secondly,

I seek to explore the ways in which ethnicity de- and re-constructed in the context of the diaspora. How are identities maintained and negotiated in response to changing social and political constructs? How are these processes of cultural and ethnic re-construction gendered? Finally, I will explore the ways in which women in the diaspora maintain attachment(s) to their "home" country. How do they navigate the tensions between diasporic attachment(s) and longing for connections to the host country?

The purpose of this project is to complicate current understandings of processes of cultural preservation that Arab-Americans improvise in response to the pressures of immigration. While current research shows that Arab-Americans participate in processes of cultural re-authenticity in which a "true" Arab culture emerges (Naber, 2006), the current research focuses generally on Arab-Americans. I have chosen to focus on Egyptian-Americans within the specific locale of New York City and Northern New Jersey because there is a lack of in-depth research on Egyptian-American diasporic communities (el-Sayed el-Aswad, 2006, p. 112). In order to showcase the gendered aspects of cultural preservation, I have chosen to focus specifically on first-born daughters in this particular diasporic locale. My focus on first-born daughters is purposeful as there is currently no existing literature regarding Arab American eldest daughters. My focus on eldest daughters is particular because first-born daughters may be tasked with maintaining cultural preservation in equal part with their mothers (Naber and Jehani, 2018, p. 370). This research on Egyptian-American eldest daughters is needed in order to define and extend current research regarding diasporic tensions and modalities of gendered cultural preservation.

The ethnographic data collected in this research study has the potential to complicate current conceptions of the Egyptian-American and Arab-American diaspora, as well as other diasporic communities worldwide. My focus on the ethnographic accounts of first-born daughters within the diaspora could potentially open up opportunities for future research on eldest daughters in addition to focusing on diasporic women more generally.

5. Conceptual Framework

The key conceptual framework that this research relies on is preceded by the assumption that diasporic communities participate in processes of cultural preservation and are affected by the various locales in which they exist. There is an implied assumption that diasporic communities will see to participate in processes of cultural preservation in order to maintain and bridge connections with either the culture or identity of their country of origin. The theory that I will be investigating is that in the course of these improvised processes of cultural preservation, there will be a connection between the pressures of existing in the diaspora and gendered, classed, and racialized aspects of cultural preservation. Implied here this that there is a particular habitus (Bordieu, 1990) that facilitates the prolonged attempts at cultural preservation by diasporic communities.

Current research on Arab Americans shows that Arab American communities participate in processes of identity-making that facilitate both interaction with and comparison of others versus the self, in an attempt to define and hold onto what is defined as "Arab" culture. When looking to define the self through opposition to the other, one must consider the way bodies interact and

define one another through those interactions, the self becomes imagined through the way it interacts with others, and the difference is a reactionary relation between bodies that serves as a site for producing and maintaining the self. This mode of defining selfhood is a tool for the self against the other (Ahmed, 2000). These relations work to define the self through interaction, and in opposition to the other. These relationships often have positive outcomes when they are used to define commonalities in pursuit of community building. This method of defining the self has often been used in nation-making, in which peoples define themselves with common attributes to create imagined communities embodied through the nation (Anderson, 2016). However, according to Sara Ahmed, defining the self through opposition to the other often features unequal balances in power and thereby becomes a potential site of violence (2000). One example of this is the Orientalist European mission to define the Occident in opposition to the Orient (Said, 1979). The Europeans used their interactions with the Orient to define themselves as advanced, civilized, and sophisticated, in order to justify violence, occupation, and colonization. According to Edward Said, "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (1979). In other words, defining the self through differences from the other has long been used as a tactic for community building and defining differences, to both good and bad ends. After all, it is evidently easier to define the self by what it is *not* than by what it *is.*

The Orientalist tactic of self-definition via setting itself off from the "other" that was used to justify colonization and extrapolation of the people of the Orient has been adopted by the very people it had been used against. Upon finding themselves in the diaspora and living in the West, Arab immigrants find

themselves grappling with a new, complicated site of identity-making and find themselves recycling Orientalist patterns of community inclusion and, on the other hand, exclusion. Arab immigrants in the West, in attempts to hold onto constructions of Arab culture they participated in back home, participate in a strategy of identity-making that is premised on selective assimilation. Arabs in the diaspora, in a fashion that echoes that of their Orientalist colonizers, seek to define themselves by setting themselves off against the "other." This strategy is gendered and falls disproportionately onto women, whose sexualities are policed and controlled in an attempt to define the self with the supposedly Arab values of virginity in opposition to that of the American whore. In this formulation, Arabs associate Arab values with "love, community, cohesiveness, and control" and American values with "individualism, autonomy, and alienation" (Naber, 2006).

In her ethnographic study of Arab-Americans, Nadine Naber describes this process of identity-making as cultural re-authenticity, a "localized, spoken, and unspoken figure of an imagined "true" Arab culture that emerges as a reaction or an alternative to the universalizing tendencies of hegemonic U.S. nationalism, the pressures of assimilation, and the gendered racialization of Arab women and men" (Naber, 2006, p. 88). The process of identity-making that Arab cultural re-authenticity facilitates results in a static formation that freezes cultural and religious understandings in time. When these understandings of identity-making are frozen in time, they go uninterrogated and thereby serve to preserve conceptions of culture that are absent of historical and political context (Naber, 2015). This formation of cultural understanding and the preservation of a singular "true" Arab culture falls onto the backs of the girls and women that are unwittingly born into them; in other words, when these processes of identity-

making and cultural re-authenticity go uninterrogated as they have, women bear the brunt of the pressure to preserve and honor patriarchal and religious expectations.

For Egyptian-American (Muslim) women in the diaspora, these processes of identity-making and cultural re-authenticity are very real and have practical implications for everyday life. They are felt through the imposition of double standards between men and women, in which women are not afforded the same ability to assimilate into American culture as their male counterparts are. Elhillo reflects on this process in her own life and childhood, saying "I grew up watching men I knew drink and smoke and go to the mosque, all in the same day. Their Muslimness felt like it made room for everything in their lives. The women I knew were not at all afforded this nuance—they were regarded either as religious or as secular. There was nothing in between. So I grew up hearing and using terms like "bad Muslim" and "good Muslim" and thinking of them as fixed identities" (Asghar & Elhillo, 2019). Elhillo's reflection on the dichotomization of the "good Muslim" and "bad Muslim" reflects that of the "Arab virgin" in juxtaposition to the "American whore." Though the context of Al Zayyat's novel is not set in the diaspora, Layla's feelings upon reaching womanhood clearly echo in the hearts and minds of the women of the diaspora even several decades after her novel was published. She writes: "On that remarkable evening Layla had not been able to fathom why Gamila had given her that melancholy gaze, or why her father had wept. It was only with the passage of years that she came to understand -- and then she understood very well, indeed. She grew to the realization that to reach womanhood was to enter a prison where the confines of one's life were clearly and decisively fixed. At its door stood her father, her

brother, and her mother… Those prison limits are marked by the trenches, deeply dredged by ordinary folk, by all of them; by people who heed the limits and have made themselves sentries." To be a woman in the diaspora means your body becomes the site of cultural and patriarchal preservation and embodied subjectivities. For Layla, entering womanhood meant entry into a prison in which her society and her family created the bounds and enforced them. For the Arab diasporic woman who is pressured to uphold the bounds of her culture, the same concept applies. The diasporic Arab woman's body is, without her consent, made into a political playground in which heteropatriarchal and heterosexist values and pressures are instilled and enforced.

In such a formation where women's bodies become the site of collective identity-making, women are faced with two options: comply with the expectations that are set, or risk losing the support of their community and family. Though Arab culture is associated with community and love, these formations prove fallible when put to the test of the woman's lack of compliance with them (Naber, 2006). The pressure to comply with and preserve standards of cultural re-authenticity is an impossible one, and hardly a choice at all for the women that find themselves grappling with them. As such, this process of identity-making must begin to be interrogated and begin to allow Arab women the same nuance and ambiguities that are allowed to their non-Arab peers. Lila Abu Lughod points out that there are too many nuances and ambiguities present in the stories and lives of Arab women to explain away their desires and livelihoods with any simple or singular explanation; Arab women in the diaspora are no exception to this observation (1998). In order to move past these limiting, recycled Orientalist forms of identity-making, it is necessary for Arabs in the diaspora to make way

for new formations that allow for nuance and difference. We in the diaspora need to find ways to move past the dichotomization of the Arab virgin and the American whore and allow women to become autonomous subjects without risking the loss of community or familial support.

This being established, I do not aim for this study to be objective nor representative of the general population(s) or locales within which my interlocutors exist. I aim for this research only to provide color to a population that has historically been marginalized and wrought with contradictions and hopes to provide nuance to the ethnographic accounts of my interlocutors. My standpoint as a researcher that identifies with being a member of the Egyptian American diaspora as well as a first-born daughter informs my research methods as well as the stories that I am able to collect from my interlocutors. This positionality as a researcher eliminates the possibility of objectivity, which is in itself a flawed concept that is rooted in colonial-era anthropological observational methods that define objectivity as being dependent on the perspective of the outsider looking in. Multiple truths can and should exist. By allowing for a degree of mess in my understanding and observation, I hope to complicate existing understandings and present the stories of my interlocutors as truths that exist but do not intend to establish a monolithic understanding.

For the purposes of this research, I collected the ethnographic accounts of six Egyptian American first-born millennial daughters from Astoria, Queens, and Northern New Jersey over the course of six months from February through July of 2022. These accounts were collected through oral conversations that took place at various cafés and restaurants, per my interlocutor's comfort and discretion. I

utilized a combination of recordings and extensive fieldnotes as they were appropriate for record keeping. All names and some identifying details have been changed in order to preserve the confidentiality of my interlocutors. In addition, quotations from recorded interviews have been edited for clarity.

6. Chapter Overview

The analysis of this research is done through three distinct frameworks The second chapter, titled "The Didactic Power of Emotion," focuses on the role of emotion in both affecting and informing social interactions. This chapter seeks to answer the question: What is the role of emotion in affecting and informing social interaction? In order to explore the role of emotion in affecting and informing social interaction, I focus on shame and fear as affective emotion(s) which are used to influence and shape interpersonal interaction. This chapter focuses on the ethnographic accounts of Hana, Nora, and Habiba. I find that shame and fear are tools that are utilized in order to enforce adherence to socially prescribed bounds. Through these three ethnographic accounts, we are able to explore different ways in which shame and fear are utilized within the family unit to shape the ideal daughter.

The next framework through which I center my analysis is the processes of identity-making. The third chapter, titled (Re)Creating Ethnicity, explores processes of identity-making and seeks to answer the following questions: How is ethnicity de- and re-constructed in the context of the diaspora? How are these processes of identity making and cultural re-construction gendered? Through the ethnographic accounts of Farida and Amal, I explore the complex processes of

identity making that are present in the diaspora. I find that, in contrast to current research, Farida and Amal's accounts complicate current conceptions of Arab cultural formations within the American diaspora. In this, I focus on popular modes of identity making within Egyptian American communities and the way that these women perceive themselves, their communities, and the idea of cultural values.

The fourth chapter focuses on bridging tensions between the diaspora and the idea of the "homeland." Titled "From Margin to Center," this chapter explores diasporic longings and cultural maintenance, seeking to answer the following questions: How do women in the diaspora maintain attachment(s) to their "home" country? How do they navigate the tensions between diasporic attachment(s) and longing for connections to the host country? Through the ethnographic account of Lama, I explore some of the ways in which she chooses to bridge the tensions present in diasporic existence with connection to the homeland. In this, we explore the methods that women may employ in bridging connection to their families as well as the idea of a homeland.

Chapter 2

The Didactic Power of Emotion

I am ashamed of what I *am*. Shame therefore realizes an intimate relation of myself to myself…I am ashamed of myself *as I appear* to the Other.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1996, as cited in The Cultural Politics of Emotion, p. 104)

It's often said that in every joke there is a morsel of truth. What started as a bit of a joke between myself and my five hundred or so Twitter followers ended up resonating with thousands of people, garnering 26.9k likes, 4,180 retweets, 365 quote tweets, and 48 replies at the time of writing. The tweet, reading "i only

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support horny tweets from women that were raised in shame-based cultures. we deserve it. as for the rest of you, go repent" is intended to be a facetious comment on self-expression that takes place on public social media platforms. At its core, it was a one-off commentary on my own experience as an Egyptian-American and Muslim woman and the way that I, along with other women that were brought up in shame-centered cultures, deserve to be given a pass for expressing our sexuality every so often on online platforms. I expected it to get a laugh from the five or so people that usually interact with my tweets, but it struck a chord with thousands of women online. Though I was not expecting the mass response that I received by sending the tweet, I also was not surprised that so many women had related to the sentiment that was expressed. Shame as an emotion affects women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in insidious ways. While the interactions this tweet received were predominantly of women relating to and agreeing with the point that was made, the central dissident response that I received was of people raising the question, "who among us was not raised in a shame based culture" (N/A, tayoncé, 2022)? This prompted me to think more deeply about the way that shame culture operates and how it affects those that are subject to it. Although man women across transnational borders who belong to separate cultural formations will experience shame culture in some way in their lives, it will not affect each of them in the same way because each woman is subject to a particular habitus that will form the ways in which she interacts with and perceives the world, as well as her own actions. The discourse surrounding that viral tweet led me to think more deeply about how different women experience shame culture and how it affects their sense of identity and self-expression. This led me to ponder one of the primary research questions that I

sought to answer in this work: What is the role of emotion in affecting and informing social interaction? I will be exploring shame [and secondarily, fear] as a primary affective emotion to gauge its role in shaping social interaction. In my exploration of shame, I will also be touching on fear in tangent with shame. In order to engage with these topics, I will first explore the discourse surrounding shame as an affective emotion, and then delve into the stories of three of my interlocutors, Hana, Nora, and Habiba.

2.1 On Shame

To engage with the idea of shame as an analytical and affective lens, it is necessary to acknowledge the discourse and arguments regarding shame. I will first be defining shame for the purposes of this work and distinguish it from other emotions that it is commonly grouped together with; once the definition of shame is identified, I will explore the arguments regarding its use as a tool of analysis within contemporary academic and popular discourse and discuss the ways in which shame is used as a tool for identity-making.

The basic definition of shame is defined in the dictionary as "a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety" and secondarily as "something that brings censure or reproach" ("Shame," 2022). Though shame is frequently discussed, there is not quite a consensus on its definition in either psychological or academic discourse. The idea of shame is frequently argued in both psychological and academic circles. In Eve Sedgwick's reading of Silvan Tompkins shame is a primary affect and goes so far as to say

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that it shapes our ability to have engaged with and be interested in the world around us (Sedgwick, 1995). Shame can only operate in a world that we are engaged and interested in, as it is a tool of belonging as much as it is exclusion. Shame operates as a result of the basic desire to be accepted by the society that one inhabits. Shame as an affective emotion is activated when one feels as if they do not *belong* in some way and desires to belong.

As shame becomes relevant in a space of the insecurity of belonging or not belonging, shame as an emotion becomes a valuable site of identity-making; in defining strangeness and actions or desires that do not belong, it becomes easier to define those ideals that do belong, and hence to define the self and the community at large. To that point, Sara Ahmed notes that shame can only function where love is present (Ahmed, 2014). Shame would not be able to hold any power if it were not for the presence of love, because the seeking of human connection and belonging is preceded by love. Ahmed notes that "Shame as an emotion requires a witness…it is the imagined other that is taken on by a subject in relation to herself or himself…I commit the action, and the feeling of badness is transferred to me…In shame, I am the object as well as the subject of feeling…In shame, I expose to myself that I am a failure through the gaze of an ideal other" (2014, p. 105-106). The self becomes imagined through the way it interacts with others. Difference is a relationship between bodies touching that serves as a site for producing and maintaining the self; this mode of defining selfhood is a tool for defining both likeness and difference (Ahmed, 2000). To that point, Ahmed warns that defining the self via opposition to the other often features unequal balances in power and thereby becomes a potential site of violence (2000). In defining the self through the imagined other, shame becomes a tool that can be

used to both positive and negative ends.

In understanding how shame can operate as a site of violence, it is important to understand the difference between shame as an affective emotion versus guilt. As showcased in the dictionary definition of shame that was defined earlier in this section, shame is an emotion that is commonly mistaken for and associated with guilt. While shame and guilt are without a doubt on the same spectrum of emotion, they should be distinguished from one another in the way that they are utilized and felt both on an individual and a societal level. One of the primary differences between guilt and shame lies in the power dynamic that it plays therein. Shame is more often experienced by those that are members of oppressed groups, while guilt is associated with the presence of power (Stearns, 2017). As Stearns puts it, "Socially dominant groups, more confident, are more likely to experience guilt; shame is the more likely response of submissive groups, or those held to be inferior" (2017, p. 5). Further to this point, guilt is distinctive because it influences individuals to act in a particular way as defined by societally accepted ideas of right and wrong, with the desire to do the right thing; in this, it should be noted that it is more the action that is penalized, rather than the individual who commits that action (Stearns, 2017). While shame similarly influences individuals to act in a way that remains within societal bounds, it goes deeper and seeks to penalize a person committing a wrong action, rather than condemnation of the action itself.

I would argue that the move from guilt to shame shifts the blame of the commission of an act from the body to the soul in favor of a private, individualized penalty focused on introspection, supervision, discipline, and

control of the mind and soul. Shame is distinct because it criminalizes the person that is committing an act rather than the act itself – "it is the self that is at fault, not the commission of the act" (Stearns, 2017, p. 3). When someone was punished in the public sphere, the goal was to punish that person and his relatives. The shift to the private sphere and the criminalization of the soul facilitates a shift from punishment from being temporary to be more lasting. The shift to the shaming of the soul and the private, hidden sphere was a move from public to a more insidious, self-admonishing private. In speaking on crime, Stearns explains that "guilt is more likely to convince prisoners to avoid crime in the future, whereas shame—though not always generating outright recidivism—produces a desire to lash out against unfair emotional pain and social blame" (2017, p. 5). Shame as affective emotion serves to repurpose carceral logic and shift the disparaging of societal norms from merely a transgression of action to a condemnation of personhood.

In summary, shame is a primary affective emotion that operates as a site for the formation of personhood. Through shame, the individual can define their participation in society and express via action and feeling their longing to belong to the group. Acceptance into the larger community is conditional and dependent upon the individual's participation in and acceptance of social norms. Shame primarily affects those that have less power within the defined social structure and operates by and through carceral logic; by threatening rejection from society and shifting the blame from the action itself to the person committing it, the utilization of shame works to ensure adherence to established norms. Understanding the idea of shame is valuable in understanding the role of gender, the body, and sexuality in the experiences of eldest daughters in my research

group because it is one of the primary vehicles for influencing adherence to social norms. In the next section, we will be exploring the lived experiences of two of my interlocutors and exploring the ways that shame is present as an affective emotion in the experience of Egyptian American eldest daughters.

2.2 Shame and Fear

Though I will be focusing more so on the various manifestations of shame in this chapter, it is helpful to understand shame in tangent with its potentially more extreme counterpart, fear. In order to explore these concepts, I will be engaging with the works of Bordieu and McGranahan. Before I engage these works, I'd like to define what I mean by politics of fear and shame and situate them in this particular context. Throughout various periods of history, fear in itself has been mobilized in order to elicit a certain type of reaction or produce particular behaviors in the societies it has been utilized in. The mobilization of fear has been used within contexts and justifications of war, racism, classism, the workplace, the family, and more. An example of the use of fear lies in the United States' War On Terror: since the attacks of 9/11, an artificially manufactured fear of the "other" [I specify that this fear is artificially manufactured through popular media, films, government statements, etc. because fear of others is taught and learned] has been used to justify the military occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, surveillance of American citizens, and attacks on civilians. Fear has historically been used to control and manipulate populations and cause them to act in a certain way. In regards to my research group, the fear of being ostracized from the community or risking the loss of patriarchal connectivity can be used to pressure women into remaining with societally defined specifications of right and wrong, good and

bad, as they relate to the women within their respective families and communities. Shame, on a related note, has historically been used to pressure people to act in a certain way, on account of fear of social ostracization or potential retaliation from those in power [usually blood relations]. In thinking about Egyptian-American diasporic women, shame has been utilized in order to shape social action and prevent diversion from social boundaries at the risk of losing their social positions in their families and communities. Both fear and shame have been used to ensure the elongation of patriarchal power and influence the behaviors of women. These politics of fear and shame are both intentionally and unintentionally reproduced by both the people who enforce them and those that exist under them, allowing these patterns to persist throughout different generations.

One of the thinkers I've found useful in thinking through these processes is Bordieu, in particular through his idea of unconscious reproduction of thought. In his *Logic of Practice*, he theorizes that in order for processes to be reproduced and maintained in subjects, it is necessary to unconsciously reproduce knowledge because if subjects are aware of what is happening then they will fight against it. He writes that "Even if it is possible to decide to believe "p," one cannot both believe "p" and believe that the belief of "p" stems from a decision to believe "p"; if the decision to believe "p" is to be carried out successfully, it must also obliterate itself from the memory of the believer" (1990, p. 49). This passage helps us to think through the process of unconscious reproduction of thought and alignment with social patterns that have been produced by those in power via politics of fear and shame. If subjects are conscious of the processes that they are subjected to, they may seek to dismantle systems that they have been

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unconsciously subjugated by, inciting rebellion. It is important, for those in power within these systems of familial control, for those subjected to these dynamics to be unconscious of the processes that they have been subjected to.

Of course, even when the subject becomes aware of the processes they've been subjected to, the politics of fear and shame are designed in a way that makes it difficult or impossible to live outside of the patriarchally defined boundaries of what it means to be accepted within the family or society at large. In the context of my research, this pertains more specifically to the idea of what it means to be "good" as a girl and then as a woman in the diaspora, and the unspoken and spoken expectations of right and wrong. This is where Bordieu's idea of social capital comes in and becomes useful in understanding this process. Due to the realities of patriarchal connectivity and the reliance of women within patriarchy being protected by and defined by their connection to patriarchs, having greater social capital would allow those that would want to resist these standards the ability. Those that do not have social capital outside of their families would find it more difficult to resist these standards and get rid of shame within their lives and communities. For example, a woman that does not have connections or even protection outside of her family or community would find it difficult to express an autonomy that is even slightly out of the established norm or even to outright reject standards that her community has set. A reliance on familial connection in a situation like this could prevent a woman from exercising autonomy because it could result in loss of personal or financial security or otherwise. Because of this, it is safer to live a kind of double life, where parts of their identity will be hidden from their family or certain social groups. Where the politics of fear and shame have been mobilized to control women, instead of necessarily influencing actions

to fit within societally defined boundaries as intended, it pushes them into an increasingly fragmented sense of self.

Finally, it is important to think about the possibility for politics of refusal within this story, as thought of by McGranahan (2016). Willful refusal allows subjects to refuse the politics of fear and shame that have been used to control women within these contexts. This refusal is hopeful in that refusing to engage with processes that are reliant on subjugation can allow for a reimagining of what it means to exist within a community and be an active, accepted member of it without necessarily doing so. Instead of resistance, which can be passive, some parties may choose outright refusal as a modality towards the disestablishment of imposed norms. Choosing to refuse to be part of these processes and not ascribing to societally defined behavioral rules, is to take the power of those rules, and the power of the utilization of fear and shame, away. According to Holmes, "the negative and isolating qualities that are constitutive of the affect of shame are negated when it is confessed. To confess one's shame is to destroy it" (2015, p. 415). If people that have been subjected to these processes of fear and shame choose to reject it and bear the consequences of it instead of simply leading a double life, then it may lead to a radical reformation of the social process and an end to the weaponization of shame.

2.3 Hana

I met with Hana for iftar at a restaurant we had both wanted to try in Manhattan. This meeting was one of many dinners we had shared since had met through a mutual friend in the years prior and became close friends. In the earliest stages of our friendship, we bonded over our shared lived experiences—we were both first-born daughters to Egyptian immigrant(s) and, though I was

born in California and she in New York, we were both living and growing up [as women in their mid-twenties do] in New York City. Hana is twenty-seven years old, the eldest of four siblings, and was born and (mostly) raised in Astoria, Queens. Her parents immigrated to New York City from Gharbeya and Mansoura, Egypt in the mid-1980s and early 1990s.

Hana's father first emigrated from Gharbeya, an Egyptian governate located in the Nile delta, in the mid-1980s, following her uncle's immigration to the United States. Hana's father emigrated as a direct result of changes in socio-political and economic liberalisation policies that were adopted as part of the "Infitah," also referred to as the Open Door Policy, that was adopted during late president Anwar Sadaat's term in the 1970s (Weinbaum, 1985). The 1971 Constitution relaxed many of the country's restrictions regarding emigration and resulted in a large-scale wave of emigration to surrounding countries, as well as to the United States, where a majority of Egyptian immigrants settled in New York City or Los Angeles (Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program, 2015). Hana's father was one of many Egyptian immigrants that settled in New York City. In his early years in New York City, he settled in Astoria, Queens, where he owned and operated a deli. Astoria, Queens serves as a hub for Egyptian immigration, and is home to an infamously predominantly Egyptian community known as Little Egypt (Morsi, 2021). Following his years as a deli-owner in Astoria, Hana's father went on to operate a number of franchised restaurants, and currently earns a living as a real estate agent. After establishing himself in New York City, her father returned to Egypt in the early 1990s and married the woman who would become Hana's mother. Hana's mother comes from Mansoura, another agricultural city located in the Nile Delta. Soon after they

married, Hana's father brought his new wife to New York City, where they lived together in Astoria. Not long after, they brought Hana and her three siblings into the world.

Hana was raised in Astoria, Queens, and lived there until she was nine years old. When she was nine years old, her mother moved her and her siblings to Egypt to shield the children from what she heralded as "Western influence" [we'll talk about this more later]. During their time living in Egypt, her father remained in New York City in order to earn money for the family. She spent ten years living in Mohandessin, a neighborhood located in Giza Governate, before moving back to New York City at the age of nineteen. Before moving back to New York, she attended her first year of college at a university in Cairo before transferring to a local university in Queens. She has lived in Queens ever since, occasionally visiting Egypt.

We spoke extensively about her relationship with her family and her siblings. As she was the eldest of her siblings, from a young age she was tasked with the responsibility of setting a "good" example for her siblings ["good" meaning well-behaved, successful in school, ambitious in career, devout in religious practice]. Her parents told her, at the age of seven years old, *enty el kabeera*—"you're the oldest" [translated verbatim to "you are the biggest"]. She continued, "you are the first cart in the train – if you move, they move, and if you crash, then they crash." She lamented, "that's a lot for a seven-year-old to hear." Being made an example of by her parents caused her to grow up quickly, and created a perception of self that centered not around her, but around the perceptions that others could potentially hold about her. Where her younger

siblings were able to experience childhood innocence and were not burdened with responsibility, Hana was taught to see herself as a model for her siblings in the way that a parent would otherwise be. Being taught to see oneself through the eyes of others facilitates the creation of the self via the expectations set by others—in particular, by her family, and by the particular habitus with which she sees the world. When the conception of self is developed in the model an ideal self and coupled with the pressure of letting others down, the potentiality for failure becomes a site for making identity making that is in itself based in the weaponization of shame. When the site of identity-making is housed by shame, the sense of self becomes intimately attached to it. As Ahmed describes, "it is the imagined other that is taken on by a subject in relation to herself" (2000, p. 105). Shame as an emotion in this formation is formative to the person experiencing it and becomes a primary zone of identity making. For Hana, when her parents task her with the responsibility of setting an example for her younger siblings from a young age, is taught that there is a link between the person that she should be and the expectations that she expected to set. If she fails to meet these expectations, not only will she suffer, but everyone after her will suffer as well.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, shame can only operate in a world that we are interested in belonging to, as it is a modality of belonging as much as it is for ostracization. As a daughter within her family, Hana was taught to please not only her parents but her siblings and the society at large. In order to maintain her connection to her parents and family, she performs the role of the good daughter and role model for her younger siblings, constantly looking out for others before herself. The reason why she is programmed to participate in this utilization of shame is linked to her desire to belong to the familial unit and find acceptance

and understanding. As Tompkins has theorized, shame affects those that feel is so much as to affect the level to which one may enjoy and become interested in the world around them. While the conception of shame is utilized to cause Hana to act in a particular way in accordance with societal and familial definitions of what it means to be a good daughter, Hana actively participates in these processes because of an instilled feeling of shame. The affect of shaming is something that happens unconsciously and affects desire to participate in society and feel acceptance.

As shame is rooted in a place of insecurity or the fear of not belonging, shame becomes an important part of the process of identity making. In shame, those actions that are regarded as good and valuable and defined against those that are regarded as bad and undesirable. So long as one adheres to the bounds that are prescribed, they will maintain their ability to connect with those around them and will build their sense of self within a framework of shame. Within the feeling of shame is a feeling a fear, a fear of not belonging or being regarded as not "good." The family structure is a place in which shame operates because, along Sara Ahmed's thinking, shame may only operate in a place in which love is felt and desired.

The degree of responsibility that was put onto Hana at a young age, in addition to coupling identity with the feeling of shame, created a degree of resentment between her and her siblings. The unequal division of labor and expectations deprived her of much of the innocence [I use innocence here with a grain of salt as the conception of innocence in and out of childhood may vary greatly depending on gender, race, and class] of childhood that her younger

siblings had experienced within the same home. Research on low-income families has shown that children in economically disadvantaged families are forced to prematurely take on adult roles within their home as a result of financial pressure on parents within the home (Burton, 2007). Along this line of thinking, this research is useful when gauging the pressures that the children of immigrants face within the family structure. In the same way that economic disadvantage shifts pressure onto children within families that are subject to it, the strains of immigration can cause a shifting of responsibility in which children of the household are forced to share responsibility with parents within the home. As the first-born of her family, Hana was obligated to share the responsibility of helping to raise her siblings and set a good example for them. This shifting of responsibility is experienced in tangent with the pressures of a changing world.

While Hana was tasked with the responsibility of setting an example for her siblings, her role within the family was at best confusing and consistently proved malleable. At times, she would be regarded as an authority figure afforded distinction as an equal to her parents. However, that role varied according to the particular situation she was faced with. To illustrate this, she tells me a story involving her mother and younger sister that took place a few weeks before we spoke:

My mom sent my younger sister of a flight itinerary that she had booked coming back to New York. My sister sent it to me, and when I asked her why she did, she said it was because Mama told her to. Mama and Baba had an agreement where he would pay for her flight, and for whatever reason he hadn't paid for it yet. I asked my mom why she sent it to my sister, and she

tells me, "because you're the head of the household." I pushed back and said, you're the parent, he's the parent, I am not. She says, no, no, it's not that—"some people are just born to be natural leaders and you're one of them." It's the whole *enty el kabeera* thing all over again.

This situation illustrates one of many situations in which Hana is regarded as the unwitting head of the household. It is clear that, as an adult, she is unwilling to fulfill this role any longer, causing her to push back against it. As previously mentioned, the way that shame operates is through a mostly unconscious process where the person that is being subjected to shaming feels the emotion and strives to belong within a structure of love, i.e. the family. As Hana has become increasingly conscious of the roles that she has been instructed and trained to play within her family, she engages in acts of refusal and rebellion, creating a diversion from the role that her parents assigned to her. Whereas the "good" daughter would not question her role and continue to play it without interrogating it, the daughter that has become frustrated with the act of shaming seeks to refuse it and diverge from it.

Hana's relationship with her family is based heavily on presupposed, unspoken assigned roles. As Hana is assigned the role of "*el kabeera*," she takes on the role of an authority figure as well as a child. Each of these roles is heavily tied to shame as much as it is attached to the possibility of failure, of not being a good child, or a good daughter, or a good example for her younger siblings. Her sense of identity and conception of self is in itself a site of conflict. Instead of viewing her parents as authority figures in all instances, she was raised to see her parents in the way that you might see a sibling or even a friend [This allows the child to

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play more of an equal role with the parents, allowing a role reversal between parent and child. In this formation, the child takes on a degree of adult responsibility while not enjoying the autonomy or privilege of being an adult. The child is trained to see the parents in a light that is subjective to times where they may be an authority figure or they may be a peer]. She details that this is a dramatically different dynamic when seen in juxtaposition to her siblings, who have not been subjected to the same degree of responsibility for the family as she has. Further to this point, she mentions particularly her brother, who, irrespective of being well into adulthood, she describes as "blameless" in her mother's eyes; while Hana was tasked with the responsibility of being a pseudo-mother from childhood, her younger brother was never given a comparable degree of responsibility over the family. This difference in treatment is partially attributed to a difference in gender but is more so explained by the birth order by which their family is structured. The birth order and differences in gender are significant because the eldest girl is expected to naturally take on the role of the second mother and leader within the family. As such, the younger siblings may enjoy a creation of self that is not shrouded in shaming that is aimed at producing a particular kind of actor within the familial unit.

Though there is an extensive literature pointing to Arab families as patriarchal and patrilineal, in practice, Arab and Arab-American families pressure the women within the family with preserving not only the family structure but also cultural preservation (Naber and Jehani 2018). As such, the division of labor with Hana's family is heavily gendered, her tasked responsibility being attached to her in girlhood and womanhood. She points out to me the apparent irony of her parents instilling a shame complex within her through designating her as "*el*

kabeera" and assigning her the metaphorical role of the train, guiding her siblings. Though she formed her identity in and around these roles, her siblings still chose different paths, irrespective of the mistakes (or successes) Hana made in her own path [An example she gives of this is that she went to and graduated from college and set the example in her family. Despite her setting the example, her younger siblings did not all follow in her footsteps]. She scoffed at the idea of the train that her parents posited her as from such a young age, remarking that the train was never following her after all.

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A few months following our initial conversation during Ramadan, Hana and I met again, this time at a café in Astoria. In the months that had passed since our first meeting back in April, we had become a significant part of each other's lives on a social level, helping me to build rapport with her as an interlocutors. Though we had initially spoken a bit about the ten formative years that Hana had spent in Egypt as a child into adulthood, we focused this conversation more about the ways in which growing up between Cairo and Queens has affected her in her adult life. As I mentioned earlier in this section, Hana's family moved back to Egypt in an attempt to resist "Western" influence [Western influence here representing a sexualized, stereotypical perception of the West]. Hana's parents, like many Arab-Americans, seem to associate values in Egypt with those of religiosity and family values, while they associate Western values with the opposite of those things. This view is not uncommon among Egyptian Americans and more generally among Arab Americans. Egyptian culture and the idea of

culture "back home" is oft associated with positivity and wholesomeness, while American culture is regarded as negative. Particularly when it comes to daughters, parents fear the reach of what they regard as Western influence and may take extreme measures to ensure their idea of culture and values are preserved through their daughters. While it is likely that a majority of Egyptian-American families aim to preserve supposedly Egyptian values by offsetting them from American values, a number of Egyptian-Americans have chosen to return to Egypt in order to raise their children away from what they perceive as negative influence in the West.

One of the primary topics that came forward in our conversation was that of her conception of her body and the way that she inhabits space within it. She explained to me that when she first returned to Egypt at nine years old, after spending the first part of her childhood in Astoria, it was at that time that she became conscious of her body and the way that it inhabited space. Though the onset of conscious regarding the way in which one's body looks and is perceived is common among young girls around that age, she ties this consciousness intimately with her new surroundings. She explains that when she entered primary school in Cairo, she was required to wear a school uniform, something that she was never required to wear in her school in New York City. She details that, while she wore pigtails and her school uniform, she was looked at and catcalled by men on the street on her way to and from school. She explains that the experience of being sexualized from a young age made her hyperconscious of her body in a way that she hadn't been before her family had moved to Cairo. When she expressed to her mother her discomfort towards the catcalling she was being subjected to on the streets, the "solution" she was given was the practice of

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modesty and repression of her sexuality. Her mother's advice, in the same fashion that her parents' pressure instilled in her a complex of shame with regards to setting an example for and taking care of her siblings, once again turned her gaze inward and exposed an apparent failure of the self. As she learned that her discomfort with being harassed was caused by the way she dressed, or the way she acted, she too learned that the suppression of those things would save her from that feeling of discomfort. When the catcalling continued, despite her changing her dress and becoming quieter, she held onto the idea that blame lies within the self, developing her sense of self alongside a deeply ingrained complex of shame that shifted the blame from the perpetrator of harassment to its unwitting victim.

Shame is once again utilized in order to create a particular type of daughter and eventually, woman. Shame is utilized as a tool to encourage the practice of modesty, in response to the perpetration of sexual harassment. In an attempt to encourage adherence to cultural values regarding dress, Hana's mother uses shaming to shift the blame from the perpetrator onto her, to her body. This shift from perpetrator to the body of the girl serves to create a negative perception of the self that is shrouded in shame. If Hana accepts that that blame lies within herself, she continues to hold onto shame in an attempt to avoid harassment.

When she returned the United States at nineteen, after spending ten years living in and attending school in Cairo, she tells me of the effects of her mother's advice to practice modesty in order to avoid unwanted attention from men: "I was so used to the idea of being careful when I go outside so I wouldn't attract the attention of men, so when I came back to the US, I would always wear a size

up so I could hide my body. I'm usually a size medium, but I would wear a large in everything so the shape of my body wouldn't show." Continuing, she tells me,

> Mama would say God gave you a good body so you can hide it. He's testing you with this body so you can hide it. Even now, whenever I go outside if I am wearing anything revealing or tight it's commented on by my mom. The other day, I was attending one of the most important events of my life, something I was really excited for, and I put on a nice dress. Mama told me – 'this dress, don't wear it again.' I was going to one of the most important days of my life, but my mother was focusing on my clothes and the way that I look. She said, 'I have to tell you this because God told me to tell you. You do whatever you want.'

This excerpt from our conversation is telling of the relationship that Hana was taught to have with her body as it pertains to her in adulthood. Notable here is the way that her mother invokes the name of God in her attempts to influence Hana to dress more modestly. Invoking religiosity is important because it is an effective means of inciting feelings of shame within a person that believes in God. If God is giving you a good body so that you can hide it, if God is testing you with your body, it reinforces the idea that any unwanted attention or reactions to your body must again be your fault and connected to a supposed personal or moral failure. By invoking a religious sense of shame, Hana's mother is able to influence Hana's perception of right and wrong and invoke a deeper complex in which the feeling of shame is once again transferred to the self. To this point, Hana expresses that she sometimes thinks "that bad things will happen because [she] did something bad or dressed a certain way." She described a physical sensation in

the feeling of shame, of anxiety and fear surrounding it.

As a child, Hana was subjected to a unconscious utilization of shame in order to influence the way that she acted and saw herself as a model for her siblings. Additionally, from the time she was a child through her young adulthood, she was subject to processes of shaming with the intent of influencing an observance of modesty in dress. In both of these scenarios, she is taught to view perceived "bad" actions (setting a bad example, dressing immodestly) as sites of potential moral failure, inciting the feeling of shame.

Something that I found interesting was the way she explained her mother's own experience as a young girl in dealing with the way she dressed. She tells me, "My mom once put on a short skirt and her father physically tore the skirt up. She just went to her room and cried, and that was it." Hana's mother seems to have been taught to feel shame similarly and was also punished in her desire to express autonomy or go outside the norms prescribed by her own parents. It seems that the process of shame that Hana's own mother was subjected to was passed down, creating an intergenerational line of behavior and pointing to a greater pattern regarding the utilization of shame.

2.4 Nora

Nora and I decided to meet and talk at a shisha lounge in Astoria, Queens. Like Hana and I, Nora and I were brought together by chance and by a mutual friend, and had become close since I moved to New York City. Nora is in her mid-

twenties, and half Egyptian, and half Dominican [Her mother is Dominican, and her father is Egyptian]. Because of her mixed background, she spent time growing up in between the United States, the Dominican Republic, and Egypt. Nora is the first-born daughter and has one younger brother that is thirteen years younger than her. Her father was born and raised in the city of Tanta, located in the Gharbia governate approximately 94 kilometers north of Cairo. Her father emigrated from Egypt to the United States in 1992 after being accepted to attend graduate school in New York City.

After having grown up in Tanta, Nora's father left his home as a young adult in order to attend university in Cairo [she details that he was very ambitious in spite of being told he would never "get anywhere," particularly not to the United States. I am unsure who told him that he would not be successful, but I infer that it must have been close family members]. After completing his education, Nora's father established a successful career as a journalist and became the host of his own news program that aired in the Arabian Gulf. He met Nora's mother within a couple of years of his emigration from Egypt at his graduate school [Nora pointed out that the university that her parents met in just so happened to be the university that Nora's fiancé attended, as well as the same university where Nora held her first teaching position]. As Nora's father identified as Muslim, Nora's mother converted to Islam when they got married, after having been raised in the Catholic church. Nora emphasized that her mother's conversion wasn't so much a conversion with the intention of getting married; instead, she emphasized that her mother "always said it was stupid to pray to saints. When she learned about Islam it seemed like all the pieces just fit."

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Nora was born shortly after her parents married in mid-1990s [she was, in her words, a "honeymoon baby"]. In the course of our conversation, we spoke extensively about Nora's relationships with both her mother and father. Her relationships with each of them appear to have shaped much of the way she sees the world, in that she surrounds her childhood around them. In the absence of younger siblings throughout her early childhood, Nora inhabited her family effectively as an only child. Because of this, her childhood experiences center around her parents, rather than her interactions with younger siblings—though her younger sibling becomes relevant in her later adolescence and adulthood.

Nora places the beginning of her consciousness at around six years old. She was exposed to some of the darker aspects of life from a young age, as she witnessed her mother struggle with alcoholism, mental health, as well as her physical health. Her mother's struggle with mental health, as they manifested in addiction and Bipolar disorder, was the center around which Nora's development took place. She explained that her mother suffered particularly with her mental health during Nora's early childhood because medications and treatment for her mental health issues had not been developed at that time. As a result, Nora spent much of her youngest years seeing her mother struggle with her disorder and with addiction. She explained to me that starting in 2004, her mother—at last—received proper treatment for her mental health issues. Once her mother received treatment, Nora's life vastly improved. She described those years after her mother's treatment as the happiest years of her life. Despite her receiving treatment that aided in her mental health, her physical health soon caught up to her. Three years after her mother started receiving proper treatment for her mental health, she suddenly passed away from a complication of her autoimmune

disease. It is clear to me that her mother is an important figure in her life, and her death seems to affect her to a great degree. She confided in me that her father didn't allow her to go to her mother's funeral when she passed, and made her go to school the next day, effectively minimizing her mother's death. She wasn't allowed to properly grieve her mother's death, adding insult to injury with regards to her mother wound.

As can be inferred from her father's regard to her mother's death and funeral, Nora's relationship with her father is perhaps even more complicated than it was with her mother. She explained that her father was very strict with her throughout the duration of her childhood and adolescence. He attempts to maintain control of her movements and wouldn't allow her much lenience with regards to restrictions placed upon her. Shortly after her mother passed away, when she was about nine years old, Nora's father decided to return to his hometown of Tanta, Egypt. After they returned to Tanta, her father decided left her there by herself [with his extended family] for a number of months. During this time, Nora was molested by a female family member. She attempted to tell her extended family members what had happened to her, but either no one believed what she was saying, or they simply excused the family member's behavior, excusing her actions in saying that she had been hurt in a similar way when she was a child. They instructed Nora to keep quiet about it, so as not to affect her or her family's reputation. Since that incident, Nora has continued to have an estranged relationship with her father's family through adulthood. Though unrelated to her estrangement from her father's family in Egypt, Nora added that she also has an estranged relationship with her mother's family in the Dominican Republic because of their lack of tolerance to her mother's conversion

to Islam. One of Nora's maternal aunts had an especially strong estrangement from her mother, as a result of what she denotes as jealousy with regards to her parents relationship.

Nora spoke quite a bit about a number of her father's decisions, and the way that they shaped the course of her life. Not long after her mother passed, Nora's father got married as a woman he was having an affair with got pregnant. The woman was Moroccan and ten years his senior, so he was about 40 and she was about fifty years old. As the story goes, the woman came to him one day claiming that she was pregnant. Nora's father initially did not believe her because of her age, and made her come back with a paternity test to prove that he was the father. When the paternity test proved that the child was in fact his, he ended up getting full custody of their son as the woman indicated that she did not want to be a mother. At the time that Nora's younger brother was born, she had just been starting high school. As a result of her father lack of presence in their lives—his absence attributed primarily to his work—she essentially had to raise her little brother, taking the place of the mother that he did not have. Being forced to care for her brother was a huge amount of responsibility. As her brother grew up, and it became more and more clear that her father exercised double standards in the way that he raised her and the way chose to he raise his son. Nora's brother was treated quite leniently. He never learned about consequences of his actions, was spoiled, and allowed to do "whatever he wanted." This leniency came in stark contrast to the way that Nora was raised, who felt the strictness of being an Egyptian girl [with regards to maintaining honor and reputation which are particularly important for girls], but was also caught in a crossroads between being American and Dominican [two different cultures that retain different

cultural norms and often contradictory values]. Nora chalked her father's double standards up to the difference in gender between her and her brother.

As I mentioned briefly before, Nora has had an estranged relationship with her family in Dominican Republic as a result of tensions that occurred following her mother's choice to accept Islam. Her maternal extended family became increasingly distant following her mother's passing. One of her maternal aunts did not have a relationship with her mother when she was alive, due to a combination of existing tensions relating to her mother's conversion and what Nora describes as "jealousy" from her aunt towards her mother. Years after her mother passed away, though the issues between her mother and aunt were never resolved in her mother's lifetime, this aunt returned to their lives. Upon her return, she claimed that she wanted to reconnect with their family [Nora seemed to be alluding that this was a lie—she continued on to say that her aunt had always been attracted to her father, and was jealous of the relationship that her mother and father had while she was alive]. When her aunt returned to their lives, to Nora's dismay, her father eventually married her. Though it was not welcome in Nora's conception to marry her deceased mother's husband, Nora expressed some relief in the fact their marriage shifted the responsibility of parenting her younger brother onto her aunt/stepmother. As a result of their marriage, when she was a teenager that was growing into a young woman she was able to enjoy some relief from the pressured of serving as a second parent. Her aunt and father remained married for about six years, until their marriage ended in divorce. Despite thier divorce, her aunt continued living with her family as a result of the existing familial tie, creating a less-than traditional home environment. The dynamic of her aunt entering her family first as an aunt, then as a wife and

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stepmother, and then as an ex-wife and aunt again facilitated the development of complicated home environment.

Her father, though he himself lived a life that would be considered questionable to most, remained strict in all aspects of her life, and would restrict her participation in social events and her general sense of autonomy. Her upbringing represented a stark departure to the way that her brother was raised. One example she gave of the degree of this restriction he still tracks where she is, and will do even surprise check-ins over Facetime with the intention of catching her "in the act" of doing something he perceived to be wrong. Though she moved out of her father's home a couple of years ago, she remains unmarried and therefore remains under the control of her father. Reputation was consistently put above Nora's safety and her best interests because the imagined idea of "what will people think?" was the driving force behind the bounds of "right and wrong" that surrounded Nora's life.

In order to illustrate the ways in which Nora's life was defined around her reputation, she tells me a story about her first boyfriend. She dated her first boyfriend starting as a teenager, and remained with him until her early adulthood. She explained that at some point the relationship had become abusive. When the relationship ended, she confided to her family of what had happened during the course of the relationship, detailing that ex-boyfriend had been sexually abusing her. Instead of coming to her aid and consoling her, her father's reaction centered around his disappointment that Nora was no longer a virgin. Reminiscent of her extended family's reaction when she came forward about her molestation by a family member as a child, Nora was again ignored when coming

forward regarding sexual abuse. In both of these instances, Nora's reputation and the reputation of her family were given more importance than her physical and emotional safety.

Nora's story differs from Hana's in the way that shame and even fear come into play in her family's dynamic. For Hana, shaming is used to influence Hana to set an example for her siblings and influence her to dress modestly. Shaming in her case becomes a deeply involved, complex system in which she internalizes the responsibility to care for her younger siblings and prevent the attraction of male attention through dress. In contrast, Nora's story centers around the utilization of fear and shame in order to preserve her and her family's sense of honor and reputation. Despite her family, and her father in particular, transgressing set societal bounds [through the act of having a child out of wedlock], societal boundaries become enforced through surveillance and restriction that are enacted by her father. The acts of surveillance and restricting Nora's movements, enforcing double standards, and placing the family's honor above Nora's personal safety facilitates the creation of a dynamic in which fear [of being "caught"] is used as a tool for enacting control. In order to preserve Nora's public presence of respectability within her community, her father works to instill a sense of fear which affects Nora's course of action in both the public and private spheres. Similar to the way that the system of carceral punishment functions, Nora is instilled with a sense of constantly being watched—something that in itself guides the way she carries herself through the world. The preservation of family values and reputation is a process that happens within Nora's body and mind. In reinforcing contradictions, Nora's public sense of honor is preserved through the utilization of fear.

2.6 Habiba

My conversation with Habiba, unlike my other interlocutors, was held over Zoom. Like some of my previous interlocutors, Habiba had learned about my research study through an advertisement that I had placed on social media which had been shared around. Habiba was born and raised in Northern New Jersey, with her parents having immigrated from Egypt in the 1990s. Her mother was born and raised in Monofeya, a village in the delta north of Cairo [She tells me that there are several running jokes about Monofeya because there are a lot of Egyptian presidents that are from Monofeya. After a Google search, I found out she was referring to late presidents Anwar Al-Sadaat and Hosni Mubarak, both of which were evidently from Monofeya governate]. Her father emigrated from Sharqiya, a governate in the northern part of Egypt located in between Cairo and Port Said. She explains that within her family, only her mother and father emigrated from Egypt, and all of her parents' relatives remained back in Egypt, except for one. She had one relative outside of her immediate family living in the United States, who just so happened to live in Astoria, Queens. Given that her relative lived in Astoria, she and her family spent time back and forth between Astoria and Northern New Jersey throughout her life, setting the background for the story of her life. Habiba is the eldest of four children, with three younger brothers.

Habiba's father initially emigrated from Egypt seeking to further his education. He emigrated from Egypt to Germany but moved to the United States seeking to further his education. She details that by the time he moved to the United States, though he was in medical school, he experienced a lot of changes

that were very humbling. Because he was now by himself and faced with the need to support himself in a new country, he immediately started to have to work. She explains, "He had to work in the falafel and shawarma carts that you see out there, the trucks and stuff like that [New York and New Jersey are home to many food carts, many of which are owned and operated by Arab immigrants]. Coming from just being a student being your job to having to really work for a living in the United States, combined with the class difference and having to learn to adjust was very interesting for him." She goes further to say that her father came to the United States for work and education and her mother, several years later, married him and also immigrated to the United States. Though they had initially only planned to live in the United States for a few years, her parents began to have children and create roots. Eventually, as they felt like things were not getting any better in Egypt and that there would be more opportunities for them here, they stayed and built their own community and lives in New Jersey.

Like Astoria, the area that Habiba was raised was home to many Arab businesses and a large Arab community. The area that she was raised in, however, was predominantly Palestinian and was home to far more Arabs claiming heritage in the Levantine region than were from Egypt. Being from an Egyptian family, this created what she calls an interesting background for her upbringing. She explains that there was a deal of tension between the Palestinian community in her hometown and the Egyptian community. She was raised predominantly in the mosque system in her local community and spent much of her time intermingling with the local community, despite the apparent tension. She tells me, "it would be really interesting because in the mosque or after school, or even in school, some of the other children would say, we don't want play with you, you're Egyptian. In my

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head I'm like what's going on? And they'll explain it like, you betrayed Palestine in the sixties and seventies [the betrayal in question is referring to the normalization of relations between Israel and Egypt that happened following the 1978 Camp David Accords, with which the Egyptian government officially recognized Israel as a sovereign nation-state]. To me, I'm like, what are the sixties and the seventies now?" Habiba's experience with neighboring Arabs points to a level of tensions that carried across generations into diaspora. Despite the national tensions that were present in her community, she describes the local community as a "very interconnected, interwoven community."

Habiba tells me that her parents were able to integrate well into the community in Northern New Jersey because most of the people in the locale they inhabited spoke Arabic, making the pressures of immigration feel less stressful. Because their community was predominantly Arab and Arabic-speaking, they were able to have Arab doctors, lawyers, teachers—anything and anyone that they may have needed was also from an Arab background. While the dominance of Arab population in the city made it easy for Habiba's parents to preserve a sense of an Arab community, Habiba also explains that it was very important to her mother in particular that they maintain their roots. She explains,

> My mother really wanted us to maintain our language and our culture and our traditions, especially because all of her family was back in Egypt. We were only allowed to speak Arabic at home too, just to make sure that we were able to retain the language. We went to Egypt a lot. We traveled a lot in the country. However, I've never been to any of the villages. I think it's because a lot of people who just grew up in Cairo, or had the privilege to

move to the city, they don't like to visit the village or go back to where they had their origins in a sense. But I feel like the diaspora experience is to want to reconnect with our roots.

In this excerpt, Habiba hints at a difference in culture between her parent's generation as emigrants from Egypt [and from their respective villages] and those that were born in diaspora. As she mentions, it's often part of the diasporic existence to want to reconnect with your "roots," i.e. the place that your parent(s) emigrated from. Habiba's mother made a clear effort to maintain her children's connection with their roots, through their practice and maintenance of speaking Arabic at home and traveling back to Egypt often. Because of her mother, she did feel a strong sense of connection to Egypt despite remaining in a prolonged removal from her roots in diaspora.

In speaking on her experience growing up in relation to her parents and siblings, Habiba pointed out the ways in which her upbringing differed starkly from that of her younger brothers. As she was the only girl, her parents in order to preserve cultural norms. She tells me,

I feel like a lot of Egyptian girls have gone through something similar to what I have. It's just hard with the optics of our communities and the way that people think. Growing up was very interesting, being the only girl. My siblings had a lot more freedom and independence than me. It was very hard to navigate because my mother was very protective, just being her only girl. My father did not really understand how to raise girls, so his best tactic was to avoid having to deal with me and mostly we just pour his energy into his sons. It was challenging growing up. Being the only girl, not having

a mom who comes from the same culture. They were very traditional, very religious as well. Things that I wanted to do here, just girl stuff, turned into a matter of religious disobedience or disrespecting your parents and stuff like that, when in reality it's just, you want to be a kid, you know? That was a little bit of what it was like growing up.

In speaking more about the beliefs that her parents held and maintained in their family, she asked me if I had ever heard the following phrase,

"البنت المحترمة تروح من بيت ابوها الى بيت جوزها"

The phrase translates to "A respectable girl goes from her father's house to her husband's house," referring to a belief that is held by many Egyptians. This phrase deals with the politics of respectability and honor that are preserved through the bodies of daughters. As the eldest and only daughter in her family, Habiba's parents aimed to restrict her movements as much as possible in order to preserve a culturally mandated sense of respectability and honor. In order to preserve the family's honor, Habiba is subjected to a process of gendered shaming that is justified through cultural norms and religious expectations,

In speaking more about her experience as the eldest daughter, Habiba details the level of frustration and restriction she experienced within her familial unit in her status as a girl in a family of boys. In describing these frustrations she tells me,

I feel like being the oldest girl, you have the emotional burden of being the oldest, but none of the privileges of being the oldest because actually your oldest brother is considered the oldest. All my brothers were younger, but

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even in the way that my family would, would refer to my parents, my oldest brother's name is Hossam, they would say, Um Hossam, or Abu Hossam, and I would get so mad. I'm like, well, are you not my parents? And they would say, you're a girl. It's عــيـب [literally translates to "shame," used colloquially to refer to something that is shameful or improper] to say your name. At some point I started to really rebel and it would get really bad because how dare I stand up to anything as a girl--A proper girl is supposed to be delicate and obey everything and say yes and not stand up for herself. You just have to be perfect. But the problem is that you can't please them at the end of the day, no matter what you do. It's like no matter what you do, you're مـقصرة, which is like, you're lacking in some way [مـقصرة also translates to delinquent]. Being the girl is like having a microscope on you at all times.

In this excerpt, Habiba details the ways in which her upbringing differed from that of her brothers. Within her family, she is expected to bear the responsibility and burden of being a girl without enjoying any particular benefit or honor. She continues,

I feel like I was a second mother without the respect of being a mother. An emotional punching bag in many ways. It was ingrained in me to not cause too much trouble or bring too much attention to myself in any way. I was the invisible support, like I just had to work in the shadows to not upset the dynamics of the household.

Habiba's family dynamic centered around her quieting herself and absorbing the needs of her family members, without bringing any attention to herself. It's clear that she experienced a great deal of inequality within her family due to prescribed

gender roles. The preservation of her family's honor went so far as to subject her to colorist beauty standards. She elaborates,

> Growing up I was always the tannest sibling, and Egyptian families are very colorist. Being the only girl, I didn't really align with their ideals of beauty and their Eurocentric standards. Especially for a girl who she marries and her display of desirability to the world sets the family honor. My siblings, my brothers are much lighter than me, with more Eurocentric features as well. And with them being boys, they are tall, handsome, whatever. They were instilled with a lot more confidence. They were allowed to work. They were allowed to kind of do their own thing or even go for a walk or go see their friend or do whatever, but they were not raised with the constant beratement that I experienced.

Habiba's experience in her family seems to center around her parents finding ways to put her down as a girl and in their mission to maintain the family's sense of honor and respectability. Her story is notable because of the degree to which shaming has been utilized by her parents in order to create a particular kind of girl. It is clear that the ideal daughter that Habiba's parents wanted to create was quiet, obedient, and even light-skinned. In the instances where she could not live up to those expectations, she was berated and ostracized from her familial unit.

Habiba's ethnographic account is important because her story shows the kind of ostracization that results in a lack of participation in the prescribed bounds. Since Habiba has chosen to push back against her parents' shaming and beratement, she is regarded as lacking in some way. Her use of the word مـــقصرة [delinquent] in describing the way her parents would regard her is notable here as

it is used as an insult to describe her lack of participation in her parents' idea of what it means to be a good daughter. Especially important here is the degree to which the justification and logic behind Habiba's upbringing centered around the utilization of Islam as a means of shaming and control. In speaking on her parents' relationship with Islam, she details,

> My parents are Sunni Muslim. My mom aligns herself more with Salafist ideology. When the Islamic Revolution happened in the nineties, My mom was one of those women who was wearing khimar [a long veil that goes down to the knees] and, you know, always in the mosque. Her own father was not literate and was not educated until the age of 17 where he learned how to read by studying Quran in the mosque in the village. He was unable to go to school because his own father had died, so his only path to education was through religion. As a result, he was strict about emphasizing that with his children. Even my grandmother, she told me that like from the day she was born, she remembers wearing hijab. When I was 14, my parents made me wear the headscarf as well. They told me, you're going to go to high school and there are going to be a whole bunch of boys, so you're going to put the shit on. They wouldn't let me leave the house or go to school if I couldn't wear it. They were very steadfast on what they believed, especially when it came to me.

The preservation of religion, which in this familial construct is heavily associated with culture, happens through Habiba's body, resulting in her observance of modesty by wearing the headscarf. In this formation, Habiba's body becomes a tool for performing modesty, honor, and desirability for the benefit of the collective

family structure, and her parents within the larger society.

> My dad was actually a registered Republic prior to 9/11, because he felt that
> the Republican party aligned with his beliefs and his ideals, family values,
> being against the Gays and all that stuff. He felt very represented with the
> puritanical ideologies here in the United States, however, after the invasion
> of Iraq and all of George Bush's war crimes, he really abandoned the party's
> ideology. After 9/11, I feel like my parents felt like they had to
> overcompensate with their religious identity to prove that they were worthy
> of respect or just being seen as people.

It is notable here that Habiba's father's idea of family values is simply the preservation of heteropatriarchal normativity. In response to the pressures presented by 9/11 and the Republican party's negative reaction towards Arabs and Muslims, Habiba's father departs from these supposed family values. It is interesting that Habiba's parents felt the need to overcompensate in their practice of religion and identity in order to prove their respectability. After 9/11, given that many Arab and Muslim Americans felt the need to defends their sense of identity in order to seem palatable for the West. In that way, a sense of identity actually develops in a place of defensiveness and vulnerability. Contrasting to the development of identity back in Egypt, you can just be Muslim and not have it be a major facet of your identity. Habiba expresses her frustration with this and points out that here, because Arab Americans and Muslim Americans exist in this sort of tension and defensive identity, you cannot critique anything in your community without it becoming something larger and more insidious. She tells me, you cannot critique Islam or aspects of our community and without feeding

into people's misconceptions about the religion. She goes further to say, regarding the tension that she feels in this state of defensiveness and its effects,

> It's a defensive identity. I had a professor in college, who I came to like a naive little kid just asking her, how do you speak out against abuse that's happening in your community when you're so worried about the world using that as justification for how they treat you and your people? And she said something that I will never forget, she said, when these men were hurting you and abusing you, they were not thinking about your community and your image. They were not thinking about how the world is going to perceive them and continue to perceive Muslim men and the Muslim women that they so claim to care so much about and not to protect through control.

2.7 Conclusion

The topics of shame and fear are present in a number of ways in both of the stories of my interlocutors that we've explored in the previous sections. These go hand-in-hand with the utilization of shame due to the presence of shaming and fear that Hana and Nora have experienced in an attempt to influence and shape their actions and worldview in the particular habitus in which they exist. Hana is subjected to processes of shaming in order to guide her in performing a role of co-mother, and influence her to perform modesty. Meanwhile, Nora, despite being subjected to multiple contradictions in values within her own family, is subjected to the utilization of fear in order to influence social action and preserve the public face of honor. In the same note, Habiba is subjected to a complex utilization of

both fear and shame in other to preserve religious observance and create the ideal

daughter. In the stories of these interlocutors, fear and shame as primary emotions

that are useful tools of analysis in understanding the lived experiences of eldest

daughters in Egyptian American families.

Chapter 3

(Re)Negotiating Ethnicity

3.1 Introduction

To exist within the confines of diaspora is to become the subject of complex

processes of ethnicization and re-ethnicization. Members of the diaspora, in their

displacement, consciously and unconsciously participate in the processes of

identity making, continually negotiating and renegotiating the boundaries of

what it means to inhibit a particular ethnicity or nationality. Diasporans exist

outside the periphery of any clear definition of what it means to inhibit each of

their respective identities, stepping in and out of those bounds that are ascribed to

them by birthright or nationality. The assertion of "I am Egyptian" or "I am American" is complicated by variations in time and space; diasporans exist in the in-between, continually defining and redefining the lines of what it means to be either, or, or both. Noor Naga illustrates these tensions of identity through the voice of her nameless, fictitious rendition of a diasporic daughter of emigrants that has "returned" to her home country Egypt:

> We're pliable and capricious, shed our skin at the slightest thread and ultimately stick out everywhere we go. We were both more convincing Egyptians in New York than we'd ever be on this side of the Atlantic. There I had enough Arabic to flirt with the Halal Guys and the Yemenis at my deli. At school, identity was simple: my name etched in hieroglyphics on a silver cartouche at my throat. I could say, *Back home, we do it like this, pat our bread flat and round,* never having patted bread flat or otherwise. But here I keep saying I'm Egyptian and no one believes me. I'm the other kind of other, someone who come from abroad, who could just as easily return there (2022).

For Naga's daughter of emigrants from Egypt to the United States, identity is malleable and subjective to the place in which she inhabits. While in New York, her Egyptianness was unquestionable; in Egypt, her Americanness comes to the forefront. As a diasporic subject, the establishment of identity becomes more complex than simply being Egyptian or American; the diasporic subject is both, and neither. She is both Egyptian and American and creates a new category in which her ethnicity is de- and re-constructed depending on the time and space in which she inhabits. The hyphenization of Egyptian-American assumes the

creation of a category that exists outside Egyptianness or Americanness. To inhabit that external, hyphenated category of being Egyptian-American is to occupy a position of double consciousness (Bois, 2020) in which one feels their "two-ness" and is pulled by "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one…body." The deployment of double consciousness facilities a complex process of identity making in which two presumably conflicting identities come together in their mutual antagonization to facilitate the birth of a new category in which actors engage in processes of de- and re-ethnicization. These processes of identity making are influenced by a number of factors including but not limited to spatiality, temporality, class, and gender. These processes are heavily gendered and can be examined through the bodies, minds, and testaments of diasporic women. In this chapter, we will explore these processes of identity making and seek to answer the following questions: How is ethnicity de- and re-constructed in the context of the diaspora? How are these processes of identity making and cultural re-construction gendered? In order to answer these questions, we will explore testaments gathered from two diasporic Egyptian American first-born daughters living in the New York City area in order to understand the ways in which they understand themselves, their families, and communities, and engage in processes of identity making and ethnicization.

3.2 Dual Citizenship, Double Consciousness

Citizenship, in the context of the contemporary nation state, is a measure of belonging that places the nation at the center, deriving from its collective identities that are centered around an assumed common identity, history, and culture (Joppke, 2003). Depending on the nation state that is being referenced,

citizenship is both ethnicized and de-ethnicized. This means that according to research on the de- and re-ethnicization of citizenship (Joppke), immigration in the contemporary liberal nation state elicits a process of de-ethnicization, in which citizenship cannot be tied to a set of ethnic traits or backgrounds; on the flip side, emigration sanctions a process of re-ethnicization, in which the citizen maintains ties and communal identity with the state they derive citizenship from, irrespective of movement or mobilities (430, 441). In an increasingly globalized world that facilitates mobility across transnational boundaries, in keeping in accordance with liberal conceptions of citizenship, the idea of dual-citizenship, or belonging to more than one nation state at a time, has increased (Joppke, 441). Increased tolerance of dual citizenship has led to a higher prevalence of dual nationalities, in which dual citizens ascribe to the collective identity of more than a nation state. Tolerance towards dual nationalities has necessitated the expansion of categories of identity and ethnicity, given that traditional conceptions of ethnicity may no longer apply to subjects that ascribe to multiple nationalities at the same time.

The expansion of citizenship and adaptation to the idea of a dual citizen has necessitated the creation of a new, unique category, in which the dual citizen also adopts a dual identity. In research on Middle Eastern immigration to Brazil (Lesser), the creation of a new ethnic identity is accomplished via the adoption of a hyphenated and ethnicized identity that did not previously exist in the Middle East, in which many immigrants began referring to themselves as "sírio-lebanese" (1996, 57). Lesser explains that "Since this ethnic formation does not exist in the Middle East, the use of "sírio-lebanese," with its implied notion of "Brazilian" as well, provides a clear indication of how immigrant minorities constructed

hyphenated identities in the face of a national culture that tended to reject them" (57). In a case study of Middle Eastern immigration to Brazil, immigrants used the hyphenated category of "sírio-lebanese" to acknowledge a move away from classical categories of identity that could no longer define their ethnic ties to a homeland. The displacement that occurs in the creation of a diasporic community facilitates a rift in categories of citizenship and ethnic distinctions: these subjects, when removed from their home country, are no longer just Syrian or Lebanese. When faced with a new national context that they must inhabit as immigrants, they create a categorization that implies ethnic origin and also implies identification with the new nation. Notable here is that this differentiation of ethnicized identity is a reactionary consequence of rejection from the new nation which the immigrant community inhabits. When faced with rejection by the host nation due to ethnicized national origin, immigrant communities improvise new identities that acknowledge the new homeland without forsaking or forgetting their ethnic and national origin(s).

The birth of this new category of identification is necessitated when communities become diasporic, by choice (through voluntary immigration) or otherwise (through forced displacement), and settle in a host nation that has a conflicting set of values and ideals. The diasporic community is not accepted by the host nation for a variety of reasons that can include but are not limited to difference in religious beliefs, skin color, and language. As a reaction to this rejection, and in its most extreme form oppression, by the host group, diasporic communities are forced to employ what W.E.B. Du Bois has referred to as "double consciousness." Double consciousness is a sensation in which one may see themselves from the insider's perspective in an oppressive society, in which the

outsider feels his "two-ness" in the face of clashing ideals and societal values. Du Bois writes on double consciousness,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

Du Bois termed the idea of double consciousness to encapsulate the feeling of being a Black American in the United States, in the context of oppression and widespread subjugation, to describe the internal conflict that one undergoes in their struggle to maintain connection to Black culture while simultaneously conforming to the dominant, white culture. While double consciousness was termed to struggles of Black people in America, it has been expanded to describe the feeling of "two-ness" that diasporic communities feel in living in societies that, as a result of intolerance to difference, reject them. This idea is helpful in understanding the processes that immigrants unconsciously or consciously participate in within the diaspora in order to maintain connection with their ethnic origin and combat rejection by their host society.

While the idea of double consciousness allows us to put a name to the internal conflict that one undergoes in attempting to maintain connection to one's ethnic origin in a society that oppresses them, it is interesting to note than people who experience double consciousness participate in various levels of acculturation or assimilation. People who experience double consciousness in

diasporic immigrant communities may participate in processes of acculturation or assimilation to the host society, while at the same time attempting to hold onto and maintain the values and beliefs of their society of origin. According to research on the performance of ethnicity (Kachtan), actors from marginalized groups may choose between various levels of acculturation from complete, to selective, to dissonant, in order to fit in, or reject, the society which oppresses them (2017). Kachtan explains that "While some individuals aspire to "constant acculturation" by learning the dominant culture, others seek "selective acculturation" by learning the dominant culture while preserving elements of their parental culture, and those who aim for "dissonant acculturation" reject all aspects of their parental culture (Portes and Hao, 2002)" (710-711). These varying degrees of acculturation may be subject to change depending on the specific context or scenario of which the actor is faced with. An example of selective acculturation within the United States is the propensity of Black Americans to engage in "code switching," in which actors selectively adopt variant speech patterns depending on the company they are with in order to "pass." Code switching is an example of selective acculturation because subjects that engage in it learn the language of the dominant culture and selectively switch between vernaculars, consciously switching between African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and the language of the dominant culture, i.e. whiteness; while some people choose to actively code switch, it is important to note that others choose to blend the two vernaculars into one speech pattern, thereby engaging an alternate form of selective acculturation (Young, 2009).

While it was previously thought that individuals that can "pass" by adopting the dominant culture would adopt those privileges afforded to the dominant

group, contemporary studies have proven the reality is more nuanced and dependent on a variety of factors (Kachtan). An illustration of the adaptation of passing, and subsequently not passing, can be seen within the trajectory of Arab immigration to the United States. In response to laws that explicitly limited naturalization to "aliens being free white persons, and to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent," Syrian-Americans fought in 1915 for their supposed right to be "classed as white persons" in order to attain naturalization, and thereby achieving whiteness (Gualtieri, 2001). As a result of legislation that was passed to class Syrian-Americans as white, Arab-Americans and peoples of Middle Eastern descent "achieved" whiteness, and remain legally categorized as white in the present day. In the context of post 9/11 America, the category of whiteness for Arab-Americans becomes increasingly complicated as a considerable rift between white America and Arab-America has developed. This rift has effectively taken away the assumed or gained whiteness that Arab-Americans had previously been afforded. In place, Arab-Americans have once again assumed the category of non-white. Assimilation to whiteness is not possible for many Arab-Americans because Arabness, and Muslimness, in particular, are viewed as threats and are thereby vindicated. In addition, those that may be perceived as such may experience racialization and be grouped into the category of Arab or Muslim, which is seen as being synonymous with non-white. Fourlas explains, "In the absence of explicit systemic recognition through a protected class status, Middle Eastern Americans are not just vulnerable to the social-systemic violence that accompanies racialization; that violence is being tacitly permitted" (2015, 101).

Arab-Americans have endured not only a departure from whiteness but

enter a uniquely racialized category of difference. In alignment with Orientalist thought patterns that were birthed in the context of European colonialism and empire, Americans repurpose Orientalist distinctions of difference in order to separate Arabs and Arab-Americans from the larger, dominant white group (Said, 1979). Though this departure from whiteness began prior to 9/11, the attacks of the Twin Towers which facilitated the racialization of Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans as terroristic and opposed to American ideals served to accelerate this departure. Here, it is assumed that Arabs and Americans must have distinct value systems that are inherently opposed. In the face of these supposed differences, an "us-versus-them" dynamic is formed in order to separate the dominant white group from the minority. In this formation, Arabs are assumed to have inferior value systems that are unable to coexist with supposedly American values. A succinct example of the way that Arab-Americans are viewed within this mode of defining difference can be seen in John McCain's 2008 campaign event; in response to an audience member's apparent fear that Barack Obama was an Arab, McCain responded by asserting, "He's a decent family man [and] citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues and that's what this campaign's all about. He's not [an Arab]." In this assertion, it is clear that Arabness is associated with the opposite of what he calls being a decent family man and citizen. It is presumed that Arabness and Americanness could possibly coexist. Arab-Americans, however, serve as an example that these supposedly contradictory value systems can and do coexist, and evolve to create new cultural formations.

3.3 Arab-American Values

In being faced with an assumed clash of Arab and American values, Arab-Americans are left grappling with the challenge of preserving cultural values and practices within a dominant culture that holds apparently opposite values. In order to hold on to cultural values that are demarcated as "Arab," Arab-Americans repurpose the same Orientalist logic that is used against them to define themselves against the dominant group, upholding Arab values as synonymous with "love, community, cohesiveness, and control" and associating American values with "individualism, autonomy, and alienation" (Naber, 2006). Naber details that "*Al Amerikan* (Americans) were often referred to in derogatory sexualized terms. It was the trash culture—degenerate, morally bankrupt, and not worth investing in. *Al Arab* (Arabs) on the other hand were referred to positively and associated with Arab family values and hospitality" (2006, 87). In order to describe the process that Arabs in the diaspora undergo when faced with pressures of assimilation and racialization, Naber has coined the term "Arab cultural re-authenticity." In this, the pressure of cultural preservation and maintenance disproportionately falls on women, making the response to the pressures of immigration into a gendered process. Holding onto sexed, gendered ideation of Arab cultural values puts the pressure of cultural re-authenticity onto the bodies of women, effectively reducing the task of cultural maintenance to the maintenance of virginity. Lama Abu Odeh goes a step further and claims that it is not simply the maintenance of virginity that is important, but rather the performance of virginity à la Judith Butler (2010, 1990). Abu Odeh explains that in many cases, so long as the public display of virginity is preserved, i.e. the woman is perceived by others to be virginal, then she may still enjoy the public effects of

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societal and familial acceptance and honor (2010).

The tying of Arab values to the woman's honor and virginity makes the process of re-ethnicization in the diaspora a heavily gendered process. The pressures of assimilation in immigrant diasporic communities are largely put onto the backs of the women that are born into them. My research finds that much of the pressures of cultural preservation falls particularly onto the backs of first-born daughters.

3.4 Farida

I met with Farida to speak at a *shisha* lounge in Astoria, Queens. This meeting was my first time speaking with her, after she had reached out regarding my research after seeing an advertisement her friend had shared on social media. Farida is twenty-five years old, born in Brooklyn and, similar to my other interlocutors that we met in the previous section, was raised in Astoria, Queens. Farida is the first-born of three siblings, with one younger sister and one younger brother, and the eldest daughter. She tells me that her parents immigrated to the United States from Kafr El Sheikh, a city about 130 kilometers north of Cairo, Egypt, located in the Nile Delta of Lower Egypt. Her parents emigrated from Egypt in 1995, which is where her story begins.

We began our conversation by talking about her parents, and their journey to New York City, and ultimately Astoria. When asked about her father's profession, she starts with a disclaimer that her father was financially stable back in Egypt prior to his emigration. Prior to leaving Egypt, he had owned a jewelry

store. She explains that her father ended up in the United States by luck of the draw—one day, his friend came to him asking for help to apply for the lottery, and he decided to apply as well. The Diversity Visa Program, established through the Immigration Act of 1990 in order to increase immigration from countries that do not send a large number of immigrants each year to the United States, has been a significant factor in the increase of Egyptian immigration the United States since the 1990s (Rockefeller Foundation-Aspen Institute Diaspora Program, 2015). As luck would have it, the friend that asked him for help with the application did not get selected for the lottery, and her father did. As a result, he obtained an immigrant visa, also known as a "green card," and decided to leave Egypt. At the time that he was selected for the diversity lottery, he had recently gotten engaged to Farida's mother. After he received the green card, he and Farida's mother got married, spent a week of their honeymoon in Egypt, and then left to America.

When her parents emigrated, they initially settled in Brooklyn, New York. Despite having an uncle that had already settled in California, their family moved to New York City because her father had a couple of friends who were already living in Brooklyn. Their time in Brooklyn, however, was short, and they only spent one year living there. The year that they spent living in Brooklyn was spent living above a store and inside a building that was owned by members of the Italian Mafia. She speaks fondly of the landlord, who was also evidently a member of the Italian Mafia, for his generosity and understanding if the rent wasn't able to be paid on time, given that it was her parents' first year living in the United States. Their time in Brooklyn came to an abrupt end when, one day, her mother heard a gunshot downstairs and went to see that someone had been shot. After that, her father decided to move them to Astoria, Queens.

Astoria was attractive because there was already an established Muslim community, as well as a *masjid*, in the area. They became active members of the Muslim community in Astoria, and joined the largely Arab immigrant community that had been growing there since the late 1970s. Over time, her father was able to establish and build several local businesses that I have personally visited in the area. She explains that when they moved to the United States, her father did not allow her mother to work, so that she would be able to instill Egyptian values into their children. She explains, "He was worried about us being raised here. Especially having daughters too. He didn't want us to be too Americanized. We have cultural things, and we are Muslim. There are things that girls do here that we not supposed to do." She explains that her mother was not allowed to work for the specific intent of preserving their cultural and religious values:

> My mom didn't work so that she could insert Egyptian values into us. She wanted to raise us as Egyptian, so that we're raised as Egyptians, and we know the mentality. I know the mentality pretty well. More than my siblings. I can designate when something is very American, or very Egyptian. When my brother would talk to us about moving out or something when he was in college, I told him, that's American. No. Americans push their children out. We're not American. They trained us to remember that we are Egyptian.

As Naber and Jehani explain, Arab American families are often watchful over their daughters in the face of threats of assimilation that is brought on by immigration; in this, the pressure to preserve conceptions of "Arab" culture falls onto mothers (2018, 372).

In a later part of our conversation, she continued: "Because she didn't work, my mom was at home all the time, so we were all very close to each other. She kept us together. When we were younger, every Saturday we'd go out, the family, go somewhere, eat and stuff. They try to like keep that up. In New York especially, families are not usually like family, or everyone's doing their own thing kind of thing. So my mom tried to keep us together." In Farida's description of her family dynamic there is an emphasis on maintaining the assumed category of Egyptian, or non-American, identity. Her assertion that "there are things that girls do here that we are not supposed to do" and her statement that, "in New York especially, families are not usually like family" reveals a repeated comparison of supposed American family and cultural values in opposition to supposedly Arab values. Here, she consciously associates her family's closeness and her mother's attention in their family with positive values, and American individualism with negative ones.

The comparison of her family's retention of Egyptian, Arab, or Muslim values with the lack thereof in American societies is reflective of what Naber describes as a repurposing of Orientalist logic, in order to define oneself against that of the other (Naber & Jehani, 2018, 369). In face of the pressures of acculturation or assimilation to American values, repurposing Orientalist "us versus them" logic is a way that Arab-Americans are able to engage in a process of re-ethnicization. In defining the self against the oppositional other, they define and redefine the boundries of what it means to be Egyptian, or what it means to reproduce ethnicity in the context of the diaspora.

Notable here is her family's closeness and the degree of responsibility she

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takes on from a young age. She heralds her family's closeness as a positive thing, in the face of negative family values externally. She speaks extensively about her family's dynamic in her childhood and adolescence:

> My family is very close to each other. My best friend right now is my sister. We were very close with one other growing up. My youngest brother is my favorite sibling. I basically raised him. Me and him were seven years apart, and I would take him to all of his appointments and stuff. Because I'm the oldest, I was with my parents for a lot of it, you know what I mean? [She clarified that her parents were more active in being there for her growing up, while she was more active in her younger siblings' lives growing up.] My mom, her English wasn't that great. So for my siblings' doctor's appointments, I would go and I would have to translate. That's where I had to learn Arabic. I was kind of forced to really know the language to help my parents out. Sometimes I would translate for my siblings [to my parents] too.

> All of these responsibilities began in elementary school. My mom used to leave us at home when she would have to go get groceries or something. She would leave and tell us not to open the door for anyone. Sometimes my brother would be hungry. Since my mom wasn't home, I'd try to figure out a meal for him. I couldn't use the stove, but I would try to make him a sandwich or something like that. One time, I remember playing outside with my sister and my brother, then I went inside for a second. My mom always told me, stay with your siblings, take care of each other. I went outside for

two seconds and I went back out, and I didn't find them. They thought it was funny to hide. They were playing. I went home crying. I told my parents, I lost them. I'm so sorry. I should have been more responsible. I started crying, and then I found out they were just hiding from me. My parents went outside and found them. They're like, why'd you do that to her? I always had that responsibility [for my younger siblings] on my shoulders.

I grew up a little bit too quickly. I had all of the responsibility. Sometimes I would go take my younger siblings to the park. I could be playing with them too, but I would sit with the moms and watch them play while my mom was with my youngest brother, since he was still a baby. I grew up kind of quickly. I'm almost like the second mom at home. When my brother was hungry he would come to me [first], and ask, can you make me food?

The overarching theme that is conveyed from the above excerpts is the degree to which Farida is tasked with the responsibility of not only taking care of her siblings, but maintaining her family's connections inside and outside of the home. While her mother is tasked with the responsibility of cultural preservation in response to the pressures of immigration, as the first-born daughter, Farida takes on a similar role and responsibility to her mother. Instead of taking on a mother's role, Farida explains that her mother treats her more like a sister, than a parent. She tells me,

My mom says I'm like her sister. We have that, which, I mean I don't mind it.

I'm okay. When I need something, it's still like she's a mom when she needs to be. And she's like a sister when she needs me to be. We're there for each other. Sometimes my mom gets upset, and she'll come talk to me about it. If she gets in an argument with my dad. If something's happening to my siblings, she comes and talks to me about it. My dad too. He'll come talk to me.

We have two apartments, and I live on the third floor, and my parents are on the first floor. But I'm always on the first floor, I'm always with my mom, helping her in the house, just hanging out with her. She gets bored sometimes. She wants to go out and just hang out in Roosevelt Island or something. She just wants to sit by the water. I take her and we just hang out, and get her coffee, and stuff like that. So, we're all very close to each other."

Much of the pressure of maintaining the family's structure and coherence falls disproportionately onto Farida, as the eldest daughter. As the eldest daughter, Farida takes on a role of a co-parent, in which roles that are usually established between parent and child become blurred and she as the daughter has to take on a great deal of responsibility. Since childhood, Farida has taken on a role of a co-mother, assisting her mother with the responsibilities of family care and the preservation of family values. Often, she even seems to take on a mothering role towards her mother, in which the roles are reversed in lieu of simply being equalized. She laments her equalized role with her mother, remarking that her parents treatment of her as the eldest is remarkably different from the way they

treat her younger siblings that were not tasked with the responsibility of taking on a parenting role. She tells me, "my parents let my siblings do whatever they want. I don't get this. Do I have to start treating you guys badly so I can get what I want now? Do I need to fight you guys because I respect you? I go out of my way to ask if I can go out with friends. I'm 25, I should not be asking to go, I should just leave. But they're like, "okay, do it. I'll break your leg before you get out the door." [Though she said this while laughing, the seemingly empty threat of breaking her leg before getting out the door seems to carry at minimum a semblance of truth, given the frustration she has expressed].

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One of the primary themes that Farida brought up in our conversation was the deference to the belief that Arabs hold onto their collective values. She tells me, "We are Egyptians living in New York. Which I kind of like, because we're Egyptian Americans and our culture is there. That's like what makes us there. We don't wanna lose our culture." Here, "our culture" is assumed to refer to a set of collective, agreed upon values. The reference to Egyptian culture in this case is an assumed category that develops as a reaction to being surrounded by Americans in the United States. When she states that they do not want to lose their culture, it is with regard to those static values and performed as part of what Naber has called Arab cultural re-authenticity. Despite seeking to hold onto aspects of Arab or Egyptian culture, like many other diasporic communities, many Egyptian Americans participate in a process of selective acculturation, in which some values are selectively chosen to hold onto. This process of selective acculturation

is gendered, and in the same fashion that cultural preservation has fallen onto the mother and the first-born daughter, falls unequally onto women.

In this, culture is heavily associated with the protection of virginity, or sexual purity, of women. Per Abu Odeh, what matters here is not necessarily the actual preservation of virginity, but rather the performance of a public virginity in opposition to that of American women. While Farida has mentioned previously the way that girls are to act and not act as being different from that of American women, the pressure of preserving honor and the public display of virginity is evident in the way that her parents regard her younger brother. She states, "The youngest one [my brother] is such a little player. He talks to a bunch of girls, and my parents are like you know what? He's straight. As long as he's straight [heterosexual], we don't care." Despite sexual purity being valued, these supposed Arab cultural ideals fall apart along the lines of preserving heterosexual norms. The double standard in the way that boys and girls are treated within the family is representative of a larger amount of Arab-Americans that choose to selectively acculturate within the diaspora.

Farida, in her description of Egyptian culture in general, both praises and criticizes some aspects or beliefs that are held within her family and community. While she praises Egyptians for maintaining community care, she also admonishes it for enforcing double standards between men and women. With regards to the emphasis towards community care in Egyptians, she states, "In Egypt, at least, there's still a good thing where, if you need help, you can find it. Like, not with the government, but in the streets, there's people, there's still good people out there that, when they see a girl being bothered or something happens,

they'll come up help you. Here, if you're in an issue people mind their business usually." Again, Egyptian culture is associated with cohesiveness and care, and "here," i.e. America is associated with individualism and aloofness.

Farida's story is a salient example of the ways in which ethnicity is de- and re-constructed in the context of the diaspora. In her family's mission to preserve so-called Egyptian values, they participate in a process of selective acculturation in which values associate with Egyptian culture, and in that, Islam, are maintained in opposite to that of the negatively regarded, sexualized American culture. Identities are maintained and negotiated in response to the pressures of immigration and existence within the diaspora primarily through the mother, and thereby through the first-born daughter that has been obligated to perform the role of the co-mother. By framing Egyptian values primarily through that of preserving of the woman's honor in contrast to sexual impropriety that is assumed to be committed by Americans, these processes of identity making are heavily gendered and maintained through the bodies of daughters in the diaspora.

3.5 Amal

I met with Amal at a small café in Jersey City, New Jersey, a small city that is only a short drive out of New York City. I've often joked to friends that Jersey City and its surrounding urban areas are simply "West Manhattan," given that New Jersey is directly West of Manhattan and can be reached by a twenty-minute bus ride. As a result, many North Jersey residents tend to identify with New York City as a pseudo-hometown. Given their closeness in space and culture, the fabricated

lines between North Jersey and New York City might often be blurred. In contrast to my previous interlocutors, who were all from Queens and had ties to Astoria, Queens, Amal was born and raised in Jersey City, located in Hudson County, New Jersey. Similar to Astoria, New Jersey is home to one of the largest populations of Arabs in the United States, with one of the largest populations residing in Hudson County (Azzi). Amal had reached out to me about my research after having an advertisement on social media sent to her by a mutual friend. Amal is twenty-eight years old, and born and raised in Jersey City, New Jersey. Amal is the eldest of three children, with one younger brother, and one younger sister. Her father immigrated to the United States from Cairo, Egypt in the late 1980s. When I asked where in Cairo her father was from, she stated that she wasn't sure, and she "just goes to Alexandria to go to the beach." Not long after, her mother immigrated from Alexandria, Egypt in the early 1990s.

Amal tells me about her family's background, explaining that when her father emigrated from Egypt, his siblings had already emigrated to the United States. One of her uncles that had emigrated prior was a professor at multiple prominent universities in New York City, and had settled into a comfortable life in the Tri-State area. After he had established himself, he brought his siblings to the United States, bringing Amal's father. In his early years in the United States, Amal's father worked a security job. She explains that prior to emigrating, he had already held his Master's degree from Egypt. When he immigrated to the United States, he got a Master's degree again and started working for the county as an accountant, where he remained for a long time. During this time, he started to invest in real estate properties. After her father had been living in the United States for multiple years, he returned to Egypt, met Amal's mother, and married

her within a week. Shortly after their marriage, Amal's mother also emigrated from Egypt, and began to build what she refers to as their "empire." As Amal's father had already begun investing in real estate, Amal's mother stepped into her role of mother and business partner. Together the couple began investing in properties, starting out with a small store, and then a house, and another house, and so on. They went on to own a chain of laundromats, as well as residential and commercial properties, throughout New Jersey. Their evident success cemented her family's status as part of the bourgeois, land-owning class of Egyptian immigrants in the area. Prior to emigrating, Amal's family enjoyed an equal class status back in Egypt. Amal explains, of her parents' success, that "they built an empire."

Having parents that were busy operating several businesses and managing many properties afforded their family prosperity and financial comfort, but did not come without downsides. Given that her parents were always working, as the eldest, Amal was tasked with taking care of her younger siblings, often by herself. In her words,

> I was always the second mom because my mom and dad were both working. They were always working crazy hours. Even when my dad was working at the county prior to my mom coming [to the United States], he also had a taxi. When he finished his normal work hours, he would then go and drive the yellow cab. Both of my parents were workaholics. It was to the point where sometimes they would pick us up from school and we would be sitting in the car until 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock at night, until like they were done with all their work. It was a massive amount of work for them, so 24

hours wasn't justifying it."

Though her parents' preoccupation with business afforded them comfort, it forced Amal to take on the role of becoming a second mother, and a co-parent. When her parents were not able to fulfill their roles as caretakers, Amal was forced to take on the responsibility to care for not only herself, but her two younger siblings. In particular, Amal took on a mothering role for her younger sister, with whom she has a thirteen-year age gap. In a later part of our conversation, she explained:

> My little sister, she's my baby. I basically changed her diapers, took care of her. She was literally my daughter. Even with school, I was like her parent. I'm the oldest child of an immigrant family, so even though my dad is highly educated and has a master's degree in Egypt and the United States, I still have the responsibility of translating. I need to still read certain documents and understand them. My parents speak English well. But it's still not their native language. So they just expect their first daughter to know everything.

In explaining her family's dynamic, it becomes clear that her parents' preoccupation with their businesses and work has forced Amal into a role that exceeds that of a child. She continues, saying that "Aside from my parents' kind of being missing from the house. I had to take the responsibility of cooking and cleaning and studying for my brother [who is three years younger than Amal]. Then when my sister was born, I was fully mothering her. And then, later, taking care of my parents was another role that I gained." As the eldest, Amal has

inherited the responsibility of taking care of her entire family, and mentions in particular serving as a mediator between her parents and the outside world by serving as a translator on official documents. Children serving as mediators between immigrant parents and the outside world is not uncommon for many children of immigrants, who find themselves performing the role of liaison between their parents and the outside world. Sanmeet Kaur writes, of her own experience, "Every time we left the house together, I did something I thought all children did: I spoke for my parents. All the adults in the room would be looking down at me, their faith placed in the arms of a five-year old to help bridge the gap between two foreign worlds" (2021). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Farida had also taken on a similar role, serving as a translator for her parents and communicator for her younger siblings in contexts that an adult might typically deal with, like going to the doctor, or reading government documents.

Amal's experience in childhood is starkly different from that of her younger siblings, which she explains by saying, "My mom took all her energies, put it into me, and then everyone else got to relax and live their life." When asked how exactly her experience contrasted from her younger siblings, she states:

My parents were very strict on me. I've always had more responsibilities than my friends. I guess because of that, if I'm not doing something, I always feel like I'm wasting time. That's how my mom raised me. If I am not making use of my time, I'll eat myself alive. My little brother… he's living his life. He's the only boy in the family, so he was spoiled. Anything he wants, my parents try to do it even though they can't rely on him for anything. He's not an individual that they'll turn to and call if there's an

issue. It's always me. Then my sister, she's so cute. She has hobbies. She likes to draw. I envy both of them.

The role reversal between Amal and her parents has clearly affected the way she inhabits the space within her family. Instead of being seen as a sibling, she is seen more as a co-mother. In this, she feels a degree of envy towards her younger siblings who did not have to endure these realities in their lives, as she had already taken the burden off of their backs by being the first born.

When asked how the realities of her childhood affected her, she states adamantly that she doesn't want to have kids of her own, and she doesn't want to get married again. Having already had to take the responsibility of essentially raising her younger siblings in her parents' absence, Amal has taken the decision, against societal expectations, to not get married a second time or raise children of her own. This declaration about not desiring children or a second marriage of her own was interesting to me, because it was the first time Amal had ever mentioned that she was previously married. She explained to me that the primary reason she got married was because she felt like she had to do so, a result of societal pressure to follow the status quo—marry, settle down, and have kids. She decided to marry a man who was her friend, as she thought it would work out due to their existing friendship. They ended up divorcing after about a year of marriage when he made her life harder than it was before. She explained to me that her ex-husband had laid his hand on her a total of three times, each time she fought back and hit him back. She said of all the times her husband had laid a hand on her, his parents did nothing about it. She chalked up his shortcomings to his being "lower class" and having a lower class mentality. In her words:

My ex was born here [in the United States], lived a little bit in Dubai and lived a little bit in Egypt. He's way more Arab than me. He had an Egyptian attitude. When I travel back to Egypt, we are dealt with as upper class. But his family is not from an upper class family. So in their mentality, certain things were acceptable that I would not accept. My ex would say—what is that famous phrase? *El regal qawemoon ala al nisaa*. [This phrase is a quote from the Qur'an, Chapter 4:34 — الرِّجَــالُ قَوَّامُــونَ عَــلَى النِّسَــاءِ]. It's like, men are responsible for women and women are obligated to listen to them [The actual translation of the verse is that men are the caretakers of women]. He kept referring to that quote again and again. He had an Egyptian mentality. I decided I'm not going to accept that. So I can see why people think I'm Americanized. I'm here in New Jersey and I choose to be here in New Jersey, and at any point in time I could relocate to Egypt if I wanted to. But I don't fit in there. I don't fit in here either. I don't fit in either place. I feel like in Egypt there's a whole entire culture that I don't understand.

Notable here is that she seems to clearly associate being higher class with being more progressive and well mannered, and being lower class with being backwards and ill mannered. She uses demarcations of "Egyptian" and "American" as presupposed categories, wherein she associating ideas of backwardness and her own experience of subjugation with having an "Egyptian mentality." From her tone and the way that she expresses herself, I assume that this admonition is coming from a place of hurt in her experience as a divorceé.

Given her negative experience in her marriage and divorce, she has essentially cut ties with her local community. When I asked her about her

involvement with her community, she seemed to not want to share, or maybe felt uncomfortable sharing. She just affirmed again and again that she wasn't involved much with the community, and declared that she didn't like "drama." Though her associations with regards to Egyptian and American, upper class and lower class, are indicative of what some might regard as an abrasive and classist viewpoint, it seems that she has formulated these distinctions and separations in her head as a result of what she went through during her divorce. While this judgement is an inference given her behavior and apparent withholding during our conversation, it is clear that these associations have been made. When asked directly what her parents would associate with Americanness or Egyptianness, she stated that they would describe Americans as "living life. But living an empty life. They're living life, but there's no grounding factor [as in, family values or collectivity]." In her parents' view, Egyptians are the smartest if they are in a good mood, but if they're in a bad mood, they're lazy. Again, she tends to associate more positive attributes to Americanness, while associating Egyptians with some positive but also opposingly negative associations. Her associations with Egyptian and American culture(s) are, in and of themselves, heavily gendered in that they are informed by her particular experience as a female divorceé, within a community where divorce is highly stigmatized. Given that she initiated the divorce, she seems to have become somewhat of an outcast in her community.

Amal's case is interesting to me because, like Farida, she clearly makes assumptions with regards to associations of both Egyptianness and Americanness. However, unlike Farida, Amal reverses the assumptions that Arabness or Egyptianness ought to be associated with cohesiveness or family values. While Amal associates Egyptianness with some positive attributes, she predominantly

associates Egyptianness with control and a lack of freedom. In contrast to Naber's research who found Arab-Americans associated the idea of Arab values with positive traits and a reference to an idealized, static fixation of Arab culture, Amal complicates the perception of superiority that many Arab-Americans hold with regards to Arab culture. She presents a reversal in ideations in which Americanness is not put down as much in contrast to Arabness. She also complicates the perception of Egyptian and American values by bringing perceptions of class and classism. In continuing to talk about her divorce, and therein her perceptions of Egyptianness, she argues for a selective appropriate of her Egyptian-Arab identity, where she takes what she loves and values and discards the rest:

> I'm a bird that needs to fly. No one can tie me down. All my friends in Egypt, yeah, okay, they're of an upper class, but that's not all of Egypt. That's a very small percentage. I know that. There are differences between Egyptians and American. So like, for me, I just took Egyptian food, the music, and the shows. I took the movies, and I took *Sahel*, and *El Gouna*. I took my three-week vacation in Egypt, getting that nice tan and coming back. That's what I keep. And I say I'm Egyptian American. But maybe that's not Egypt.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we set out to answer the following questions: How is ethnicity de- and re-constructed in the context of the diaspora? How are these

processes of identity making and cultural re-construction gendered? In order to explore these questions, I illustrated the ways that ethnicity is de- and re-constructed in the diaspora through the testaments of two of my interlocutors. For both Farida and Amal, ethnicity is constructed around fixed ideations of Egyptian culture. They separately engage in processes of ethnicity re-construction in order to make sense of their family dynamics and respective worldviews. While Farida tends towards an idealization of Arab and Egyptian values, Amal presents a more complicated picture with reversed perspective, in which Egyptian values are seen as less-than when compared to American ones. Both Farida and Amal engage is a process of double consciousness, in which they seem to embody both American and Egyptian values in one. These processes of identity making and ethnic de- and re-constructed are heavily gendered for both of my interlocutors, as both deal with particular fixations of a woman's behavior within the construct of an idealized Arab culture. Through their stories, we can witness some ways in which Egyptian-American first-born daughters make sense of their identity and re-create it in the context of the diaspora.

Chapter 4

From Margin to Center

i turned myself into a victim of my own romanticization

brainrot bot, 2022

The voices of Fairuz, Karim Mahomud Abdel Aziz, Hamada Helal, Hussain El Jasmi and Samira Said blend together as *El Bent El Shalabeya, El Ghazala Ray2a, El Nas El Helwa, Set Al Sobh,* and *Youm Wara Youm* blare across the room. Songs in languages that I have never heard flow gracefully with songs that the elder women in my family taught me to dance to as a child. Bodies shake and sway and spin to the rhythm as it is carefully curated by the disc jockey. We dance with our hips and our hands and clap to the rhythm of the music. People belly dance and bhangra and dabke on the stage to the elation of the cheering crowd. Friends and strangers talk loudly over the music, speaking Arabic alongside English as though

they were intended before their creation to be uttered within the same breath. As I dance with my friends at a party in Brooklyn meant to celebrate the Middle Eastern diaspora, I find myself thinking that somewhere in the tempo, in the feeling of our hearts beating in parallel with the beat, we find belonging. Many people that were born and raised in the diaspora often find themselves searching for a feeling of belonging, of connection, that feels almost holy in nature. Existing in the diaspora often means existing in a constant state of tension, of not feeling either "Arab" enough, or "American" enough. Those that feel that tension embody a kind of conflict that can only exist in the body of one who is removed from their homeland. I find myself questioning, what does it mean to embody and navigate that state of tension? How does the diaspora feel and maintain (or in the alternative, not maintain) a connection to the culture of their respective homelands? What does it even mean to claim hold of a homeland that is, for many in the diaspora, reduced to a summer vacation site? In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which women in the diaspora navigate that state of apparent conflict that is present in existing in the diaspora. I will explore the following questions: How do women in the diaspora maintain attachment(s) to their "home" country? How do they navigate the tensions between diasporic attachment(s) and longing for connections to the host country? In my exploration of these questions, I will elaborate on some of the tensions that are present in diasporic existence and extend those findings to the stories of one of my interlocutors, Lama.

4.1 Diasporic Longings and Connections

The term diaspora has been used in several contexts throughout history, with its origins tying back to the original diaspora that lies in Jewish displacement. Though its original meaning comes from the forced displacement of a group of people, the word has been expanded in the contemporary to refer to ethnic and national groups that, for various reasons, do not reside in their country of ethnic origin. I find helpful for this research Clifford's usage of Safran's definition of diaspora:

> He defines diasporas as follows: "expatriate minority communities" (1) that are dispersed from an original "center" to at least two "peripheral" places; (2) that maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; (3) that "believe they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host country"; (4) that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; (5) that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and (6) of which the group's consciousness and solidarity are "importantly defined" by this continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran 1991: 83-84). These, then are the main features of diaspora: a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship (1994, 305)

Though Safran's definition of diaspora is centered around the Jewish diaspora, which fulfills all of his characteristics of a diasporic group, his definition is helpful in defining the features of the Egyptian-American diaspora. The Egyptian-American diaspora is one of many Egyptian diasporas worldwide that have

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formed since the opening of Egypt's borders to emigration that was incited by the economic liberalization of the 1970s. Since the 1970s, Egyptians have created diasporic communities worldwide, dispersing the emigrant population from the "center" of Egypt. Important to note here is that "Diaspora is different from exile, which often denotes a forced existence outside of one's homeland and "connot[es] wandering, loss, destruction, and disappearance" (Eisen, 1986, p. 151). While diasporic communities can form as a result of exile, diaspora does not necessitate exile from a homeland. For many, the separation from the homeland is chosen, in seeking economic opportunity, social advancement, or otherwise. However, like those in exile, diasporic communities that are separating from their homeland by choice will still choose to maintain a connection to their country of origin, and do so in a number of ways that tie back to Safran's idea of diaspora. Egyptians within the diaspora maintain a connection to the "center" while existing in the periphery by maintaining a sense of national identity that is largely imagined. This is largely evidenced by the diasporic romanticization of the idea of the homeland.

The romanticization of the idea of the homeland is unintentionally accomplished by repurposing Orientalist, static ideas of "back home" and creating an identity that is surrounded by that imagination. The idea of an imagined, romanticized homeland that is maintained while in the periphery is particularly salient for members of the second generation—the children of immigrants. In response to the pressures of immigration, members of diasporic communities hold onto ideas of the homeland that are passed onto their children who may never actually live in or experience that homeland. As a result, second-generation children of immigrants maintain a perception of a largely falsified homeland that is detached from the realities of the actual country. A metaphorical

example of the way that this process of preservation plays out lies in the popular children's game "Telephone." Players of the game start by whispering a phrase into the ear of their peer, and that phrase is continually whispered into the ear of the person sitting next to them until the phrase finally reaches the last person in the group. As a result of inadvertent mistaken hearing or other distortion, by the time it reaches the last person in the group, the phase is a ghost of what it originally was. The example of the "Telephone" rings true in the way that diasporas maintain ideas of the homeland—immigrants may leave their country of origin and as they hold onto and disperse stories and ideas from it, they continually distort it farther and farther away from what it initially was.

Next, as Safran defines, diasporic communities believe they cannot fully be accepted into their host country. As a reaction to this belief, immigrant communities in the diaspora learn to define themselves in oppositional terms in comparison to the host country or culture. Arab-American communities in the United States do this by defining themselves against another imagined idea a supposedly oppositional other. In defining aspects of Arab culture with positive values while defining American culture with opposite, negative values, Arabs in the American diaspora are able to maintain a sense of collectivity by defining themselves against the "other." While a degree of credibility can be lent to the idea that diasporic communities will never fully "belong" to their host country— evidenced by the fact that immigrant populations are commonly subject to marginalization by the host population—the act of emigrating from the home country in its own right represents a rift from the home country. While the immigrant population may never feel quite at home in the country that they have emigrated to, the act of emigrating, particularly when it is sustained on an

intergenerational level, means that to exist within a diaspora means that the emigrant will also cease to truly belong to the home country. This becomes particularly relevant as immigrant communities begin to start families and welcome second and third generations that have never known the "home" country as their own. Though Safran's definition of diaspora importantly defines the homeland as a place of eventual return, many in the diaspora will not choose to return. As Al-Samman notes, "Diaspora implies a chosen, prolonged existence away from one's homeland despite the possibility of return, the intent to live outside the center (home) and in the periphery" (Al-Samman, 2015, p. 24). Instead of the homeland existing as a place of eventual return, the homeland becomes a place to, at most, return temporarily. The new "center" becomes the host country that they have chosen to inhabit. While first-generation immigrants themselves may hold onto stories and ties to the homeland, as these stories are dispersed on an intergenerational level, they become an imagination that is not necessarily tied to anything concrete.

Despite connections to the homeland becoming increasingly strained and imagined as time goes on and diasporas grow, identity in itself remains defined by proximity to the imagined homeland. Though second-generation children of immigrants in the diaspora may have never even set foot in their respective homeland, they may still identify with designations of national identity and myth. Though children of the diaspora may never set foot in their country of origin, they claim ties to the country. Children of diaspora proudly claim in their diasporic existence designations of "I am Egyptian" in opposition to ties of Americanness [the designation of "American" in itself is often equated with whiteness]. In el-Sayed el-Aswad's research on Egyptian-American diasporic populations, an

Egyptian-American interlocutor aptly stated, "In *ghurba* (far away from the homeland) one becomes more Egyptian than in Egypt" (2006, 116). The rift that is presented in the process of taking oneself out of the center and entering new periphery results in the creation of a new identity process in which ethnicity is de- and re-constructed in response to changing social and political constructs, changes in time and space, and surrounding tensions. As Rubin elaborates, "The form, content, and boundaries of ethnicity are created and re-created in response to specific political, economic, and social contexts, both past and present. Ethnic identities should be seen as a reflection and embodiment of a series of past identities and conflicts rather than simply as the establishment of a new transformative form of identity (Rubin, 1991: 9)" (Stephen, 1996, p. 17). Important here is to note that the construction and re-construction of ethnicity and identity in those that are removed from their homeland should not be identified as a transformation change in identity, but rather a reactionary response to various pressures with which subjects are faced. Diasporic attachments are maintained through communication with the homeland—a process that has been enabled through technological advancements in the contemporary world—and transformed through the creation of reactionary identity in the periphery (Clifford, 1994: 304). The making of ethnic and national identity in the diaspora serves as a reflection of various tensions that are present in the context in which actors participate—American versus Arab, Egyptian versus Egyptian-American, Muslim versus non-Muslim, and so on.

The creation and re-creation of ethnicity in diasporic communities, as it results in a reaction to surrounding tensions and contradictions, facilitates the making of a particular kind of identity that does not exist in the homeland of

origin. In response to the pressures of immigration, diasporic communities find attachment with ethnic markers that set them apart from those in the host country, and seek to associate them with others within that diasporic community. Diasporic communities collectively associate with markers of ethnic identity that would not be relevant in the context of the home country. Reducing ethnicity to identification with a particular nationality reduces identity to a relationship between oneself and the home country; within the context of diaspora, this serves to collapse other categories of identity that were previously relevant in the country of origin. Where in the country of origin, subjects would have identified with one another along lines of class, identification with a particular ethnic group, or even political affiliation, the extended estrangement from their collective homeland serves to render those categorizations moot. Demarcations of class status in particular are discarded in favor of identification with the nation state, collapsing the diaspora into a supposedly equal group, though massive inequalities still persist. An example of the way that this process plays out lies in Nagengast and Kearney's 1990 study of the Mixteca in San Quintín, Mexico; in response to labor disputes, laborers discard come together to confront pressures not as workers, but as Mixtecs… "Thus ethnicity has emerged at a noticeable time of political consciousness and political action on both sides" (Nagengast and Kearney, 1990: 82)" (Stephen, 1996, p. 31). In this formation, and in the context of the diaspora, the making and re-making of ethnicity is an improvisational and reactionary process that occurs in response to changing social and political realities with which a group of people are faced (Stephen, 1996, p. 18).

Diasporic tensions between the homeland and the host country result in the creation of ethnicity that bridges these tensions. Individuals in the diaspora may

choose to preserve connections to the homeland and in turn the culture of their homeland, to degrees that may vary wildly from person to person. Because the creation of this formation of identity is housed in tension and conflict between supposedly conflicting cultural and ethnic formations, diasporans find themselves caught in a perpetual state of conflict that is perhaps best summarized in the Arabic word for the diaspora, *ghuraba. Ghuraba* indicates a feeling of estrangement or separation; when used in the context of the diaspora, it invokes feelings of longing and prolonged displacement from the homeland. As el-Sayed el-Aswad explains, "Migrants experience profound changes in their conceptual-social orientation as they move from the state of being a "majority" at home to that of being a "minority" or diaspora. In another country, giving rise to feelings of bewilderment and alienation *(ghuraba)* with which they have to cope" (el-Sayed el-Aswad, 2006, p. 111). It is the modalities through which diasporans find ways to cope with the feeling of estrangement that I am interested in exploring. In the following questions, I will attempt to explore the ways diasporic women maintain attachment(s) to their "home" country, as well as the ways that they navigate these tensions between diasporic attachment(s) and longing for connections to the host country through the ethnographic account of Lama.

4.2 Lama

I met with Lama at a bubble tea shop in Astoria, Queens. Like some of my other interlocutors, I met Lama through a mutual friend. After having spent the day together with our group of mutual friends, Lama and I bonded over the fact that we are both first-born daughters in Egyptian-American families. In our

conversation, I introduced her to my research on eldest daughters, in which she expressed interest in participating. Lama is twenty-eight years old, was born and raised in Astoria, Queens, and is the eldest of three siblings, including two younger brothers that are aged sixteen and four years old. She currently lives in Belgium and divides her time between New York City and Europe [I was able to squeeze in time with her during one of her semi-frequent trips to New York]. Like my other interlocutor, Nora, Lama is half-Egyptian and half-Latina. On her mother's side, she is half-Columbian. Her father emigrated from Alexandria, Egypt to New York City in 1985, choosing to settle down in Astoria, Queens.

Lama's father first emigrated from Egypt to the United States because his older brother got the opportunity to come to New York City and work in a restaurant with a friend who had previously emigrated. In connection with this work opportunity, he and his brother were able to obtain visas to come to the United States, where he would end up permanently residing. She mentions that he emigrated as part of a large influx of Egyptians that moved to the United States in the mid-1980s [I laughed at this, and told her that my own father also emigrated to the United States from Egypt in 1985]. Though her father initially emigrated for a work opportunity in a restaurant, he was able to attend university in Manhattan. While he worked in the restaurant, he balanced his college courses and eventually became a Software Engineer.

When asked about her relationship with her parents and siblings growing up, she described a dynamic that featured tensions between pointedly contradictory values between Egyptian, American, and Columbian norms. She tells me,

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As an Egyptian, from a Muslim background, growing up was a lot of hiding and trying not to disappoint my father. I was always trying to strike a balance between doing the things I wanted to do and pleasing my father. I'm American, in a way. Since I was born here, I wanted to do what everyone in school did, like drink alcohol, or party and stay out. My desire to both please my father and do what I wanted to do meant a lot of hiding. Since my parents were strict, I think it just made me really sneaky. I would hide parts of myself from my dad in order to please him.

Existing in a state of tension between several conflicting sets of cultural norms caused Lama to develop a fragmented sense of identity, in which she chose to hide aspects of her identity in order to preserve the respect of her father and her familial relations. Despite her choice to participate in what she denotes as "American" activities [drinking alcohol, and partying, among other things], she bridges the tensions between conflicting values by living a kind of double life. In the same way that the popular *Disney* children's show featured Hannah Montana as living between opposing worlds, Lama is caught between contradictory cultural formations and boundaries. While Hannah Montana lives a double life by donning a wig and appearing in disguise, Lama's "disguise" lies in her hiding aspects of herself from her family in order to maintain familial connection and approval. She seems to be at ease with living a kind of double life and enjoys a degree of freedom that is afforded through her parent's divorce. While her mother is aware of the double identity that she hides from her father, she is able to maintain the façade of her double life by splitting her time between her mother's and her father's homes. The maintenance of her double identity goes to great lengths—in addition to hiding her purportedly "American" activities, she has also

been able to hide the fact that she has been living between Europe and the United States for the last several years, whilst her father believes that she lives with her mother. As she described, her life from adolescence until now has centered around hiding aspects of her life from her father in order to bridge tensions.

Similar to interlocutors featured Nadine Naber's research on Arab-Americans in San Francisco, Lama is caught between conflicting societal values and must bridge them in order to find a sense of in-betweenness. Naber's interlocutor states,

> I have to figure out for myself if I can endure being rejected by my society and excluded from the social glue that keeps me tied to my roots and all the networks of social relations my family built here even though they're so reactionary… Can I endure the pain and hardships of struggling against society for the sake of following my heart? … My family and my community's love has roots and gives me stability, whereas [following my heart] symbolizes risk and daring and revolutionary uncertainty. That's what is causing my identity crisis. My life is bound up in the lives of others (2006, p. 106).

Naber's interlocutor expresses a sense of anxiety about being rejected by her community and her family should she choose to part ways from established social norms. When confronted with the choice between following her heart and potential rejection from her community, Naber's interlocutor is pulled in two opposing directions that cannot be peacefully negotiated. In following her dreams and rejecting her prescribed life path, she faces uncertainty. Though Naber's interlocutor does not present a solution for the sense of anxiety that she feels

towards potential rejection from her family and community, Lama has inadvertently improvised a method of bridging those conflicting tensions in order to both maintain a connection to her community and follow her chosen path.

In the process of bridging the conflict between supposedly American and Egyptian values, Lama selectively holds onto aspects of what she defines as Egyptian culture. When asked what she defines as Egyptian culture, she mentions the food ["the fish we eat, *mesh*, a really good lamb chop, eggs and *basterma*"], the history, aspects of Islam, and, interestingly, the act of not getting divorced [She mentioned the ways in which her uncles, in comparison to her father, who married and divorced a Columbian woman, chose to marry Egyptian women. She associates valuing and compromising for one another in order to stay married and avoid divorce as Egyptian. Later in our conversation, she details that she only wants to marry an Arab (and Muslim) man, something I infer to be connected with her comments about marrying outside of their culture]. In reducing Egyptian culture to characterizations like "not getting divorced," and detailing a relationship to national foods as the most important aspects of Egyptian culture, it becomes clear that the way Lama bridges the tensions of existing in the diaspora is by holding onto those aspects of the culture that fit into her life.

Lama maintains attachments to the homeland by selectively holding onto objects and characteristics that she associates with Egyptian-ness, and discarding those aspects that she cannot hold onto in her lifestyle. In seeking to maintain an attachment to the idea of a homeland and national culture, she facilitates the making of an increasingly fragmented sense of identity in order to both hold onto aspects of Egyptian culture that keeps maintaining peace between her selectively

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American and Egyptian identities. Interestingly, though she keeps up this fragmented, double identity for the benefit of her family, she still associates Egyptian cultural values with the preservation of family and cohesiveness. Despite choosing not to adopt what she views as all aspects of Egyptian culture, the process of selective acculturation with which she participates is evidence of an improvisation of identity-making that has resulted from tensions present within diasporic existence.

4.3 Conclusion

In response to various tensions present in diasporic existence, women in the diaspora may choose to participate in processes of selective acculturation in order to hold onto aspects of the culture they deem as important, and discard other aspects they do not wish to adhere to. Lama's attempts to preserve connections to the homeland are notable in the way that she does *not* attempt to maintain connection by living a kind of double life. By limiting her perception of culture to objects that can be consumed or the preservation of characteristics that she associates with Egyptianness, she is able to develop a fragmented sense of identity that allows her to cross fluidly between her two worlds, without transgressing the bounds of either one.

Chapter 5

Concluding Thoughts

"*Why have you come here?* This is the first thing people ask when they meet me, and their tone is more indignant than inquisitive. The more they discover, the more offended they are. *You live in America? Have American passport? Do you know what people would give for an American passport? We are all trying to leave and you have the option to be there instead — why are you here?* I try to explain that America is not heaven, that there are problems everywhere. *Trump,* I say, but it is the wrong thing to say, to the driver, to the doorman. Madame Fadya, the cleaning lady, was the only one who believed me, and seemed pleased to hear it. *The people are warmer here, kinder, more humane,* I continued, as though I had been in Cairo for longer than four hours when I met her and could possibly have an opinion."

Noor Naga (from *If An Egyptian Cannot Speak English*)

This research has sought to address a lack of research regarding the ways in

which Egyptian American diasporic women process and react to the various tensions of diasporic existence. My research shows that Egyptian-American diasporic women, as showcased through the ethnographic accounts of six first-born daughters, are subjected to complex systems of gendered, classed, and racialized tensions. These tensions become relevant in their individual subjective attempts to preserve cultural formations in the diaspora as well as the processes they are subjected to. In order to address a gap in research regarding Egyptian-American diasporic women, this work has sought to explore the various tensions present in the limited existing literature and potentially complicate dominant understanding(s) of the Arab-American diaspora.

In order to focus my analysis, I sought to answer the following questions: What is the role of emotion in affecting and informing social interaction? How is ethnicity de- and re-constructed in the context of the diaspora? How are identities maintained and negotiated in response to changing social and political constructs? How are these processes of cultural and ethnic re-construction gendered? And finally, How do women in the diaspora maintain attachment(s) to their "home" country? How do they navigate the tensions between diasporic attachment(s) and longing for connections to the host country? The above questions facilitated my analysis of ethnographic accounts that were collected and explored through the analysis of shame and fear as affective emotions, the ways in which cultural and ethnic re-construction takes place, and the various tensions that are present in bridging connections to the homeland. Through analyzing the stories of these interlocutors, this thesis has shown how first-born daughters participate in and directly and indirectly shape the direction of cultural continuity and reformation in the diaspora.

This research project started as an attempt to make sense of observed connections between lived experiences that I noticed in several of my peers. Throughout years of conversations with friends, colleagues, and fellow students that identified as first-born daughters in the Egyptian-American diaspora, I assumed that there would be a consensus of findings and that many of my interlocutors would share similar experiences. While some of my interlocutors did share similar experiences, what surprised me was the complications that my interlocutors posed to conceptions of the community that I previously held. In allowing my interlocutors to guide conversations, and building rapport with my research subjects, I was able to find new truths that complicate current understandings of the Arab-American diaspora.

In employing the methodology that I did, I was able to discard of my own presupposed conclusions as a researcher and allow my interlocutors to guide the direction of my analysis. By observing and analyzing the particular cultural habitus with which my interlocutors see the world, I was able to portray the stories of several women from similar backgrounds and varying trajectories in life. Though I started this research with assumed outcomes, I allowed the findings present in my fieldwork to inform the methods of analysis that I employed. By allowing myself to embrace a degree of mess in my analysis and allowing multiple truths to exist, I was able to present a more interesting set of ethnographic accounts.

In order to explore the role of emotion in processes of decision-making and adherence to cultural norms, I chose to focus on the roles of shame and fear as affective emotions. While I have found these emotions to be a powerful tool of

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reflection, they could also be potentially limiting, as not all of my ethnographic accounts could necessarily relate to the utilization of shame or fear by their parents in order to influence social action. Though my analysis of shame and fear limits the generalizability of my findings, my focus on these emotions as affect provides new insight into the ways that decision-making is produced in societies that highly value the preservation of honor. While the valuation of honor in a society indicates the presence of shame, this raises questions about the degree to which other marginalized groups are subjected to these emotions. This gap could potentially be an opportunity for future research regarding emotion as affect in marginalized populations.

In my analysis of the de- and re-construction of ethnicity, I found surprising the contradictions which the accounts of my interlocutors presented. In contrast to previous research that showed Arab-Americans tend to associate Arab values with love, family, and cohesiveness while associating American values with negative terms, my analysis finds that when subjected to ostracization, those purportedly Arab values become flipped in favor of American values. Instead of associating Arab values in positive terms, diasporic women that are subjected to estrangement at the hands of their community begin to associate American values in more positive terms. Something else that I found surprising in my findings was the degree to which class affects conceptions of culture and social interaction. This raises new questions of potential research, focusing along lines of class. Given the great degree of economic inequality that is present in the Egyptian-American diaspora, I would be interested to see the varying viewpoints of subjects from the working class to what would be considered upper class.

Finally, I attempted to bridge diasporic tensions in the act of cultural maintenance and connection to the homeland through the analysis of diasporic longing. This section has shown that, in order to preserve connection to culture and familial connection, some women have chosen to exercise a double identity and hide those parts of themselves that would cause social ostracization. Though this section serves as evidence of these findings, I would be interested to see future works focusing solely on what I have defined as "Hannah Montana syndrome," the exercising of a double life in order to bridge two conflicting identities and courses of action.

With regard to opportunities for future research, I would like to see a focus on eldest daughters in various diasporic communities come to the forefront. Though the eldest daughters of immigrant families are commonly talked about on social media, podcasts, and more, there is a lack of substantive research that represents these accounts and the way they present in various immigrant communities.

This research has shown various modalities through which first-born daughters in the Egyptian-American diaspora participate in processes of identity-making and cultural and ethnic preservation. The conclusions of this thesis open up windows of opportunity for future research to further complicate conceptions of women in the diaspora. The diaspora in itself represents both a degree of loss and opportunity. As Al-Samman summarizes, ""The word diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation," as well as "the sites of hope and new beginnings" (Brah, 1996, p. 193)" (2015, p. 22).

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