

Introduction

Masculinity in Urban Egypt

ON JANUARY 25, 2011, thousands of Egyptian men and women began the now famous Egyptian revolution.¹ For eighteen days the number of protestors dramatically increased throughout Egypt, putting tremendous pressure on the political system and ultimately forcing President Mubarak's resignation on February 11, 2011. The revolution was impressive in several ways: the speed of the change, the quality of the resistance, the interplay between bodies and spaces, and the role of virtual and physical space in enabling and sustaining effective peaceful opposition. One of the most important aspects of the protests is that they were largely organized, publicized, and enacted by young men and women. Asma Mahfouz, a 26-year-old woman, has been widely credited by many for sparking the protests. On January 18, she posted a video urging Egyptian youth to participate in the protests planned for January 25.² Asma forcefully declared that she was going to protest in Midan al-Tahrir on that day and asked others to join her. She used the masculine noun to direct her speech to men: "Anyone who sees himself as a man, should go out to protest. . . . Whoever says that women should not go down [to Tahrir Square] because they could be maltreated (*byitbahdilub*), or because it is improper (*ma ysabhibish*) . . . , should show some honor (*nakhwa*) and manhood (*ruguula*) and go out to protest. . . . If you are a man (*naagil*), you should go out to protect me (*tihmeeni*) and protect any girl who is out to protest."

This appeal to the man, who defines himself as a man, who could protect female protesters, as well as the sense of partnership and interdependence that Asma emphasized, resonated in a powerful way with my anthropological research on masculinity and embodiment in Egypt. Asma's words and the praise in various media for the "real men" who initiated and sustained the protests clearly paralleled the ways that people spoke of the "real man" (*raagil bi saheeh*) in al-Zawiya al-Hamra, a low-income neighborhood in northern Cairo, where I have been working since 1993.³ My ethnographic work in Cairo helped me understand the mobilization of millions of men and women who continued to protest before and after Mubarak's political demise. The dispositions that structured their conduct; the courage, solidarity, and determination they have shown; and the way their bodies became vehicles for political protest were informed by dynamics I have studied in Cairo for nearly two decades.

This book was conceived and researched largely before the January 25 Revolution. However, much of it was written during and after the massive nonviolent movement that has begun to change the face of the political system not only in Egypt but in other Arab countries as well. My references to these events throughout the book reflect their strong influence on how we think about contemporary Egypt and analyze its current socioeconomic and political structures and imagine its future. At the same time, against the backdrop of these events, it is productive to think of what my ethnography reveals about the social and economic frustrations that shape men's lives, particularly unemployment and low-paying jobs, political marginalization, inefficiency of government services and bureaucracies, and brutality of the police. More important, my analysis helps us understand some of the cultural meanings that informed the reactions of men and women to the changing events and how "structures of feeling" have been shaped by the interplay between local cultural meanings and values and broader national struggles and events. The phrase "structures of feeling" was advanced by Raymond Williams to capture the interplay between the social and personal, objective and subjective, fixed and active, explicit and implicit, and thought and feeling.⁴ He chose the word *feeling* to "emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of 'world-view' and 'ideology'" and to highlight the need to account not only for formally held and systematic beliefs but also for "meanings and values as they are

actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs.⁵ This notion is particularly helpful in accounting for how emerging ideas and feelings are being articulated within existing systems of meanings. The story that emerges, I hope, helps us understand the massive mobilization of millions of Egyptians and the unexpected magnitude of the changes that ensued.⁶

Whenever possible, I draw attention to some parallels, overlaps, tensions, and contradictions between local values and broader political and national projects, events, and discourses during and since the Egyptian revolution. However, this book is first and foremost a study of masculinity (*ruguula*) and embodiment in al-Zawiya al-Hamra. It aims to give the reader a sense of the meaning of manhood and the multiple agents who invest time and energy in the making of men. Acquiring a masculine identity is not simply an individual endeavor but is deeply connected to the recognition granted by others.⁷ While this identity is embodied by the individual actor, this book shows that masculinity is a collective project that is negotiated through interactions between the private and the public, men and women, young and old, parents and children, neighbors and strangers, friends and foes, community members and outsiders.⁸

In order to give the reader a sense of how men and women in Egypt “do gender,”⁹ this book draws on the daily practices and life stories of men and women in al-Zawiya al-Hamra whom I have known for almost twenty years. Since I first visited the area in 1993, I have gotten to know several families very well, keeping in touch with them over the years. In addition to fieldwork for two years between 1993–1994, eight months in 1997, and one year in 2006–2007, I have visited the area almost every summer since 1993. The latest visit was in the summer of 2012. My long-standing relationship with several families in the area allowed me to see babies born, infants become teenagers, children become adults, and older people age and retire. Some of my close interlocutors got married, some became sick, and some died. While both emotionally challenging and exhilarating, tracing their life trajectories allowed me to see how, under different circumstances (such as sickness, unemployment, debt, migration, marriage, and fatherhood), they struggled to meet the expectations of their families and materialize the social norms that defined them as men (and women).

Gender and Embodiment

This book is an argument against the “over-embodiment,” especially in Western media, of the women and “disembodiment,” both in the media and scholarly work, of the men of the Middle East. By “disembodiment” I mean the tendency to equate men with mind (*‘aql*), culture, reason, honor, and public life, while offering little (if any) discussion of emotions, feelings, or bodily matters.¹⁰ In contrast, women are often equated with body, nature, passion, secrecy, shame, and the private domain. Until recently, we have read about women mainly in the context of bodily functions and practices such as veiling, segregation, birthing, and sexual control.¹¹ In addition to the excessive focus on the *hijab* (women’s head cover), a telling example is the attention directed to female circumcision. While this practice has been the focus of much attention, evoking “images of child abuse and torture” and “neocolonial visions of culturally disrespectful Eurocentric paternalism,” little scholarly attention has been directed to male genital cutting.¹² In the process, the literature (without necessarily intending) continues to contribute to the over-embodiment of women and the disembodiment of men.

This is such a hegemonic view in Middle Eastern studies that I am struck by my own inability to think of the male body as a subject of analysis until recently. Since I started my research in al-Zawiya, I have heard young men talk with admiration about the strength and abilities of Arnold Schwarzenegger (loved and referred to simply as “Arnold”) in *The Terminator* or *True Lies*, as well as the ever-whitening skin of Michael Jackson. I have seen young men obsess over their hair, skin, ironed clothes, and matching colors. I have seen older men work very hard and wear out their bodies in their endeavor to secure the income their families so desperately need. I have seen men age, get sick, and become immobile. All of this would seem to merit reasoned attention. And yet I was absorbed by a discourse that emphasized the physicality of the woman and ignored the materiality of the male body. Interestingly enough, I came to see “the male body” and its social and political significance only after being “distracted” by a religious audio tape, circulated in Cairo in the late 1990s, that focused on young men, their sexual desires, and how these can be managed and controlled.¹³

Concurrently, I have seen Middle Eastern and Muslim men dehumanized in American media, including, especially after September 11,

a strong tendency toward depicting Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern men (often lumped together and assumed to be the same) as terrorists, suicide bombers, and oppressors of women.¹⁴ Just think of how often we read statements like “women and children were among the victims” in reports of events in Iraq, Palestine, or Afghanistan. Here the assumption is that only women and children are innocent and deserve our sympathy while men are guilty and deserve being brutalized, tortured, or killed. The images of Middle Eastern men in the media frequently depict humiliation at the hands of American or Israeli soldiers as well as groups of angry men chanting against the West or attacking “innocent” Westerners and their allies.¹⁵ In short, these men are portrayed either as a threat to be crushed or enemies to be subjugated and controlled.

This book aims to contribute to current studies of gender by engaging the male body as a social product and a producer of social life, as a biological entity that is elaborated by specific economic, social, political, cultural, and religious forces. The study of gender in the Middle East has shifted greatly over the past thirty years. Roughly speaking, up to the early 1980s, most studies were about men. These included studies of the market, religious orders, tribal systems, and much more.¹⁶ Men were largely presented, however, as a generic agendered group. While their words and views were the focus of many studies, their gendered identities were not problematized, leaving masculinity unmarked, under-studied, and under-theorized. Since the early 1970s, feminists have offered compelling critiques of the tendency to universalize the views of men to the whole society and pointed to the need for the study of women, their practices, identities, spaces, and worldviews.¹⁷ Over the past three decades, an impressive number of studies have complicated the meaning of femininity as well as the diverse socioeconomic and cultural roles of women.¹⁸

Only recently, however, have scholars begun to unpack the category of men, by, *inter alia*, looking at how they are affected by infertility and reproductive technologies, family planning, violence, military service, and neoliberal governmentality.¹⁹ Although over the past ten years there have been a growing number of studies that explore the sociocultural constructions of the male body and masculinity in the United States and Europe,²⁰ no similar rigorous investigation of embodiment and masculinity has occurred in the Middle East. Even though several feminists have

questioned the association that patriarchy creates between the woman and the body in the Middle East,²¹ they have paid little attention to how it also distances men from their bodies. Thus, one gains the mistaken impression that the male body is not subject to social regulations, meanings, and expectations. Hardly any studies tell us about how Middle Eastern men groom themselves, feel about being single, getting old, sick, bald, or overweight. What is the relationship between embodiment and masculinity? How does the intersection between work demands and gender norms shape the male body, its health and death? How do men negotiate different social expectations that aim to define their bodies and masculine selves? What do men and women think constitutes a real man?²² Although we often assume that we know the answers to these questions, they have rarely been addressed in scholarly work on the Middle East.

This book explores these questions by looking at the daily presentations of the body and analyzing how masculinity is embodied in different contexts. It shifts the analysis to gender dynamics and seeks to highlight the labor, time, and energy continuously invested in the construction of notions of masculinity (and femininity). It aims to recuperate the concept of gender, which is too often reduced to women in studies of the Middle East, by directing our attention to how manhood is socially produced and how a major part of this production is shaped by collective work and the joint effort of men and women. The discussion strives to account for the ever changing socioeconomic and political circumstances that shape gender dynamics as well as the productive interactions and links—and also the separations and divisions—that structure the daily lives of men and women.

Each chapter addresses some aspects of what I call a “masculine trajectory.” I use this phrase to refer to the process of becoming a man. It aims to account for the important structures, especially gender and class, that intersect in powerful ways to shape men’s conduct and identifications. It extends over a man’s life span, but it is not a linear, predetermined, or clearly defined process. It intends to capture the shifting norms that inform the making of men but cannot be neatly mapped into a set of transitions or age-based passages. A “masculine trajectory,” thus, departs from the “life cycle” concept, which assumes a fixed and repetitive socialization of individuals into clearly defined roles that support existing

social structures.²³ Instead, “masculine trajectories” are characterized by contradictory, dynamic states: achievements and failures, stability and fluidity, clarity and ambiguity, coherence and contradiction, recognition and misrecognition. A masculine trajectory may be oriented in its path, often following expected and collectively defined social expectations (such as getting married and fathering children), but it may also be fashioned by emerging and unexpected encounters (such as a demonstration in the street or a major economic change as well as mundane activities like a ride in the bus, an encounter with a police officer, or a trip to another neighborhood). It is elaborated through the interplay between the individual and the collective, the internalized and the externalized, the embodied and the discursive, and the conduct and the context. But above all, I use the phrase “masculine trajectory” to depict a continuous quest for a sense of (illusive) coherence that has to be cultivated and sustained in different spatial and temporal contexts to garner the social recognition central to the verification of one’s standing as a real man. I also use it to show the centrality of the deeds of individuals and their daily conduct while, at the same time, accounting for the collective expectations, power structures, and social norms that configure their lives and deaths.

The notion of masculine trajectory both builds on and departs from the common notion of “hegemonic masculinity,” which has been used by different scholars to describe “the pattern of practice . . . that allow[s] men’s dominance over women to continue.”²⁴ My work draws on the productive aspects of this concept, especially in placing power at the center of my analysis, showing the interplay between persuasion and force, and emphasizing the contested nature of masculinity. The concept’s vague, ambiguous, and elusive nature, however, has led scholars to struggle with several issues, especially how to define “what is actually to count as hegemonic masculinity.”²⁵ Although the notion was originally intended to depict a configuration of gender practices and relationships, over time it has become part of a set of static typologies that are not able to account for the changing embodiment of manhood and the shifting norms that inform the meaning of manhood over a masculine trajectory.²⁶ It often “obscures the very relationality, fluidity, and dynamism that it was developed to explain.”²⁷ Instead of classifying and categorizing different masculinities, I aim in this book to look at daily practices, moments of recognition,

legitimization, and authorization as well as the interplay between individual actors and “the judges of normality,”²⁸ the conduct and the context, and the norm and its actualization. Instead of thinking about hegemonic masculinity and how it relates to complicit or marginalized masculinities, my goal is to look at what hegemonic norms define as the category called “men” and how these norms are materialized in various places and times.

It is useful here to consider the concept of “intersectionality,” coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989. This notion aimed to illustrate how different social structures (especially class, gender, and race) interact and overlap in shaping subjectivities.²⁹ It was initially used to call attention to differences among women, but it can also be useful in studying men as a diverse group, whose bodies, subjectivities, and practices are shaped by the strong intersection between patriarchal structures and capitalist systems of production. In particular, my ethnography argues that the overlapping between class and gender is central to any adequate conceptualization of how masculinity is materialized, supported, challenged, and reinforced. However, it is important to take note of “the legacies of the concept, emerging out of Black feminist critique of the lack of race in feminist theorizing” in the United States.³⁰ The coming chapters refer to “colorism,” yet I would like to caution against using American racial categories and histories to understand the preference for lighter skin in some circles in Egypt.

As in other parts of the world,³¹ people in al-Zawiya show a preference for fair skin and view it as an important part of beauty, attractiveness, and desirability, especially when evaluating a potential wife. Nevertheless, seeing colorism as either a sign of self-hating or Egyptian racism does not capture the strong historical (including colonial legacies) and contemporary local, regional, and global forces (such as media representations and a booming market for products that promise to whiten one’s skin) that shape preferences for lighter skin. Neither view can account for how discussions of skin color are often codes for class and regional differences (such as Upper versus Lower Egypt). The origin of this preference and the contemporary forces that support and reinforce it are beyond the scope of this book, but a couple of comments are in order to avoid hasty conclusions about colorism in Egypt. First, “unlike race, which is based on the idea of mutually exclusive categories, skin color is arrayed

along a continuum that crosscuts racial categories.³² Rather than an opposition between black and white, in al-Zawiya there is a wider range of skin colors, which are evaluated differently.³³ Some of the shades people mention include *abyad* (white), *abyad bisafaar* (yellowish white), *abyad bihamaar* (reddish white), *faatih* (pale or light), *amhaawi* (wheat-colored, light brown), *khamri* (tawny brown), *asmar* (dark skin), and *iswid* (black). Second, people's judgments of these shades differ from one context to the other and often crisscross with other aspects of a person's bodily features, dispositions, and ethical standings. Skin color alone did not make or break marriages, restrict job opportunities, or limit friendships. I do not want to underestimate the desires, resources, and energy that many, especially young women, invest in trying to achieve a lighter shade, but it is important to note that the color of the skin is only one factor, among others, that people draw on to judge and evaluate others. In short, race in Egypt is not the same structuring historical force that we see in other countries, especially the United States. Instead, this book privileges the intersection between gender and class as especially meaningful in understanding how desires are cultivated, bodies are disciplined, and identities are constructed.

Religion is another important structuring force that intersects with class, gender, age, and spatial location to shape dress codes, rituals, and many aspects of daily life in al-Zawiya. In light of the great emphasis on the study of Islam and its impact on different facets of life in the Middle East in general and Egypt in particular, two points are important to make. First, religion structures the conduct of residents of al-Zawiya in diverse ways. For some men Islam is a central force that guides their understanding of piety and molds their daily practices; for many others it is only one force that has to compete with others (such as social conventions and global flows of ideas, products, and images), which shape their views and feelings about what is proper, fashionable, and desirable. Second, there is no direct and linear relationship between religion and masculine identification. Some men may pray regularly, frequent the mosque, and abide by most normative religious instructions. Yet, they may not have a strong standing as real men in the community (because they are not assertive, brave, or generous). Other men may not pray regularly, never attend the mosque, and sometimes violate religious

teachings (for example, drinking alcohol, using drugs, and gambling) but still enjoy social recognition and distinction for being real men. Performing one's religious duties contributes positively to one's reputation, but it is not sufficient to produce a "proper man" as understood in al-Zawiya. A real man may not necessarily be a pious man and the converse may also be true. Thus, while it is significant to investigate the place of religious values, meanings, and teachings in the making of proper men, it is equally important to explore the broader socioeconomic and political forces that structure the articulation of these values in daily life as well as the complex set of social norms that influence masculine trajectories and that might overlap, contradict, and challenge religious discourses.

The intersection between gender, class, and religion is contextualized by urban forces and Cairo's spatial and social landscape. From the very beginning, I found the urban milieu to be significant when thinking about masculinity and how it is materialized in daily life.³⁴ The diverse actors, institutions, and discourses that shape subjectivities in the city are markedly different from what anthropologists have described in rural and tribal contexts, where the principles that structure manhood seem to be clearly articulated and communicated to boys.³⁵ In a megacity like Cairo, such assumptions cannot be sustained due to the great diversity in the discourses, norms, and audiences that define the meaning of *ruġuula*. As will become clear in the coming chapters, city life profoundly influences masculine trajectories. The social standing of men strongly depends on their ability to master the city's transportation system, maneuver its spaces, make use of its different economic opportunities, manage its disciplinary powers, and avoid its risks. At the same time, "the rules of the game" are much more diffused in urban centers and men may be judged by a wide variety of criteria and several audiences.³⁶ The "judges of normality" are present in different areas, venues, and spaces. Encounters at homes, workshops, streets, schools, markets, and police stations have important implications for "doing gender." Available resources and systems such as medical services, surveillance techniques, entertainment facilities, and service industries (for example, gyms and barbershops) all impact masculine trajectories. Although the city offers different spaces for young men to escape the disciplinary power of their families, they remain subjected to others' gazes and come under the power of others, especially

the state, who seek to regulate their movements, practices, and identities. They also must negotiate the unexpected nature of urban life and the possibilities it offers. Numerous fleeting images and encounters characterize city life: a stroll on the Nile Corniche, a conversation on the bus, a poster in the barbershop, a disagreement with a seller, a slap from a police officer, or a religious audiotape in a taxicab. Such encounters may have strong implications for the hairstyles men choose, the clothes they wear, the routes they take, the spaces they frequent, the memories they formulate, and, ultimately, the kinds of cultural and social capital they accumulate. Such mobilities and the possibilities they generate are meaningful in shaping a man's reputation, how he views himself, and how others view him. They offer new potentialities for reimagining one's gendered identity, generate a sense of uncertainty about the enactment of masculinity, and present challenges to how it should be negotiated and materialized in different spaces and for multiple audiences.

The Place and the People

Al-Zawiya, currently a densely populated urban area, was mainly agricultural land until the early 1960s. In 1993, it was still on the outskirts of Cairo. Since then, the rapid expansion of the city has made this neighborhood much more centrally located and connected to the rest of the Egyptian capital. In the early 1990s it was viewed by many of its residents as far removed from the center of Cairo, but today it is a highly desirable location and only lucky men and women manage to afford housing in this very crowded neighborhood. If you take a look at Google Maps, you will see that the neighborhood is only five miles northeast of Tahrir Square.³⁷ The route from the square to al-Zawiya looks clear and straightforward and the directions indicate that the drive between the two locations will be around 16 minutes. In reality, however, the movement between the two spaces is much more complicated. Depending on type of vehicle, time of day, and traffic, the trip could take anywhere from 30 minutes and two hours.

To get to the square and other important sites and attractions for shopping, work, and entertainment, such as the metro station, the Nile Corniche, al-Ataba, Bab ash-Sha'riya, and Abbasiyya, people in al-Zawiya

use different modes of transportation depending on their budget and the purpose of their trip. Several different types of bus services connect to al-Zawiya, including the city bus (government-run, the cheapest but most crowded and least reliable means of transportation), mini-buses (a more recent, government-regulated but privately run alternative that is able to seat most of its passengers, but is more expensive and has fewer seats), and micro-buses (privately run vans that are reasonably priced but have limited seating and restricted routes). These means of transportation facilitate the engagement of men and women in economic activities, consumption practices, social networking, and leisure trips, and keep them connected to different parts of Cairo.

The population of al-Zawiya is diverse. There is a major social and spatial distinction in the neighborhood between those who live in privately owned and constructed houses and those who live in state-built public housing projects.³⁸ The geographical origins of individual families and the time of their migration to the area also create important distinctions. Families come from diverse places, including villages in Lower and Upper Egypt, other cities, and various neighborhoods in Cairo. In addition, it is estimated that around 10 percent of the population is Christian.³⁹ But perhaps the most significant distinction stems from the distribution of material and cultural capital.⁴⁰ My approach to these socioeconomic differences is informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Drawing on Karl Marx and Max Weber, Bourdieu wrote that classes are constituted through the distribution and volume of material, social, and cultural resources.⁴¹ He differentiated not only between classes (based on the volume of capital) but also between factions within each class (based on the composition of capital). Thus, we find significant differences between those who are rich in material capital but lack cultural capital and those who are rich in cultural capital but less so in material capital. These differences are significant because they form the foundation of a continuous struggle within classes over legitimacy and distinction. They are also meaningful for a deeper understanding of how class intersects with gender and age in the presentations and representations of masculinity.

In al-Zawiya, there are marked differences between families who have unstable or low incomes and those who enjoy relatively high and stable earnings. The low-income group consists mainly of families headed

by members who have limited economic leverage because of their lack of education, training in a desirable occupation, and/or high levels of unemployment. In contrast, skilled workers (*ustas*, or masters of their trades, such as plasterers, tailors, machinists, bakers, and house painters) tend to enjoy both higher incomes and greater social distinction.⁴² Other men, those with a high school or higher education, often manage to hold more than one job, which enables them to earn steady and reasonable incomes. For example, a post-secondary degree may allow a man to work in a job (for example, in a government agency) that yields a low to moderate salary but significant non-wage benefits, such as health insurance and a pension, while holding a second job, which usually involves manual work, that could be less stable but pays a higher wage. Combinations may include teacher/painter, low-ranking-government employee/tailor, teacher/driver, factory worker/office messenger, or technician/*makwagi* (master of ironing clothes). Alternatively, some men have managed to land one of the high-paying jobs created by the opening of Egypt to international investors, such as in the garment industry that produces for multinational corporations like Calvin Klein and Victoria's Secret or in tourism-related services. The luckiest men, as seen by people in al-Zawiya, are those who manage to find temporary jobs in oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and (until recently) Libya. These jobs allow the migrants to save enough money to support their families, buy or renovate apartments, and start small income-generating projects.

Many women also work outside the home before they get married. They usually aim to secure their share of the trousseau and most leave their jobs after their engagement or upon their marriage. This act confirms that their husbands are good providers and therefore do not need them to work. But women are also realistic about the job market, which only offers them low-paying jobs with long hours and involves dealing with the inefficient public transportation system, the lack of affordable and adequate child-care services, and the social expectations that women remain the main caregivers for their families and housekeepers in their homes. When they evaluate all of these aspects, women often conclude that it makes more sense for them not to work outside the home after marriage. Widows and divorced women may take up paid employment but often have to do work from or around the house in occupations such

as bead work or selling vegetables, clothes, or cooked food. These last options are also available to married women whose husbands are not able to earn enough to sustain their families. Selling domestic goods and offering localized services enable women to continue their role as caregivers and homemakers while allowing them to contribute significantly to their families' income. More importantly, it enables the family to uphold the norms that equate men with working and providing and that stigmatize the work of married women outside the home.

Cultural capital, especially in the form of high school diplomas and college degrees, is important for most families in al-Zawiya. Since President Nasser started his policies in the late 1950s, which promoted education as a universal right for all Egyptians, education became a central part of most people's views of social mobility and a better future for their children. The promise is still alive, but major problems in public schooling make the task of good education more and more the responsibility of individual families. Currently, education is one of the most significant class markers and is a major site for the reproduction of inequalities in Egypt. Most low- and middle-income families have to depend on public schools; the rich, on the other hand, are able to send their children to Cairo's expensive private schools, including British, American, and German schools. The typical family in al-Zawiya allocates a large share of its income and time to educating its children and ensuring that they accumulate the cultural capital necessary for economic success and social mobility. Public schools, largely seen as ineffective, are supplemented by a relatively costly informal tutoring system, paid for by the parents. Women, especially mothers, tend to spend a great deal of energy in arranging, managing, scheduling, and making it financially viable for their children to be part of a group of youngsters receiving good private lessons. These lessons are offered by individual teachers and are held in the homes of one of the students. They tend to be costly and are indulged in only by families with a relatively high and stable income. Several local mosques also offer cheaper alternatives to these arrangements, but parents often feel that private lessons offered at home, though more expensive, are more attentive to the educational needs of their children. The level of education and cultural capital becomes fundamental to how different socioeconomic fractions are formed in al-Zawiya. Having a college degree

certainly provides distinction and social recognition, but it is not always accompanied by material capital. Thus, savvy families work to equip their children with some type of vocation (*san'á*) and send them to train with a master (*usta*) during the summer break. They aspire for their children to combine skilled manual labor, to make sure they earn enough income, with a white-collar job (*wazeefa*), which secures future pensions and some social distinction.

It is important to note that while my approach to class inequalities is informed by Bourdieu's work, my analysis aims to avoid some of the determinism that characterizes his approach.⁴³ At the same time, although having much to offer about the embodied nature of social inequalities, Bourdieu's work remained largely focused on explaining the reproduction of social divisions at the macro level. He paid little attention to how situated individuals experience and reimagine class and gender divisions in daily life and how their experiences may change over time. In addition, in Bourdieu's work, class and gender came often divorced from each other. Thus, while his work on the Kabyle and masculine domination privileges gender, his work on distinction and taste tends to privilege class and considers gender a "secondary" criterion.⁴⁴ My analysis aims to show how inseparable class and gender are and how their intersection shapes bodies and selves all the way through.

The Changing Scene

Sights, sounds, and smells are rich and complex in al-Zawiya. The scenes in the area tell stories of daily struggles and intense social interaction. You see men and women as they partake in economic and social activities on the sides of the streets, under housing blocks, in front of buildings, and around every corner. Their activities reveal the resourcefulness, creativity, and abilities of children and adults to find new ways to socialize, fend for themselves and their families, and enjoy some laughter in the middle of hardships and daily struggles. Signs on streets, decorations on buildings, blankets on laundry lines, writings and images on walls, and the clothes people wear all communicate messages and meanings about recent events (such as a wedding or a birth), religious piety, new ways of taking care of one's body, and socioeconomic status. Strong smells also

guide your way around the area and alert you to different aspects of its activities and landscape. From the delicious scents of fried fish, *ta'miyya* (broad beans patties), freshly baked goods, and other cooked food to the stench of sewage leaks (an indication of the bad infrastructure that plagues many of Cairo's low-income neighborhoods) and trash that is collected only irregularly (another major problem in Cairo that neither the government nor private companies have been able to solve), the various smells indicate different facets of life in the area.

But it is sound that comes to my mind most vividly when I sit down to write about al-Zawiya. Over the past twenty years, I have spent many days in this area and I am always impressed by the life that never stops, day and night. It is never too late to hear children playing, crying, and talking, or men and women chatting, laughing, and quarreling. Sounds of ululating women celebrate happy events, shouts of men warn that a fight may be brewing, loud readings from the Quran mark the mourning of a recently



Residents of al-Zawiya gather to view a bridal trousseau a few days before the wedding celebration. All photographs are by the author.

deceased person, blasting music celebrates the engagement or marriage of a young couple, kissing or hissing sounds indicate a friend is calling, and piercing shrieks publicize an accident or a death. Depending on where you are staying, you may hear cars madly honking, workers banging, dogs barking, chickens and ducks clucking, or goats and sheep bleating. All day you hear the noises of sellers calling for people to buy their merchandise. Some come walking, some riding a bicycle, some pulling or pushing little carts, some with a wagon led by a donkey or a horse, and others drive around in small pickups. Products are often seasonal; depending on the time of year residents are offered foods (such as tomatoes, melons, molasses, ice cream, and various drinks) as well as household items (including soap, bleach, and dishwashing soap). Traders also come to buy things such as old bread, broken household appliances, and school textbooks. It took me a long time to distinguish a few of the audio signals of these sellers and buyers, and I am always impressed by how easily and quickly people (including young children) differentiated the various chants, rings, bangs, clicks, honks, and voices of the men and vehicles roaming the area to sell or buy things. These sounds, smells, and scenes and much more are an integral part of the urban identity of al-Zawiya and its daily life. Hearing the whistle of a friend, returning the gaze of a young woman, responding to the scream of a neighbor, reacting to the commotion of a fight, and navigating one's way among speeding cars and other pedestrians while moving in the neighborhood and the city at large are all central to how bodies are shaped and selves are articulated. These rich sensory experiences as well as the countless social interactions made possible by city life shape the daily life of men, women, and children and their locations in Cairo's social and spatial landscape. They also have been central to my understanding of the neighborhood, its spaces, daily life, and gender dynamics.

Al-Zawiya's spaces as well as its economic and social scenes have been impacted by the liberal economic policies started by Sadat in the 1970s and then pursued by Mubarak for thirty years. This period witnessed significant changes, such as the shrinking role of the state in offering basic services, an increase in socioeconomic inequalities, high rates of unemployment, a growing emphasis on consumption (especially of commodities, technologies, and media images), and massive urban expansion. This last change, in particular, has generated many problems,

including an acute shortage of housing, high levels of pollution, and unbearable pressure on Cairo's deteriorating infrastructure (including an untenable traffic situation). The shift to neoliberal rationality and forms of governmentality has occurred alongside the consolidation of "the security state," which deploys violence and surveillance to tighten its control over the city and its residents, especially in low-income neighborhoods.⁴⁵

In al-Zawiya these changes have been manifested and felt in a variety of ways. From unemployment, low wages, sharpening inequalities, and the consolidation of police surveillance in the area to an increasing emphasis on consumption and the spreading of new forms of media and means of communication, life in al-Zawiya has been shaped both by national policies and global flows of ideas, images, and products. New means of communication (such as satellite TV) have been offering new and quick ways for the circulation of information and have been profoundly transforming daily life and social interaction.

Perhaps nothing illustrates these changes as well as the telephone. In the early 1990s, when I started my fieldwork, there were few phones in the area. In some cases, when I needed to talk to a friend, I had to call the neighbor who had a phone and then stay on line until the neighbor brought my friend to the phone. Residents had to walk to local shops to make calls and pay for them on the spot. Since the late 1990s, as phone technology has advanced, phone access has rapidly expanded. In the past many families had to wait for up to twenty years before getting a landline; today almost all people in al-Zawiya have landlines and the majority of young men and women have mobile phones. Most recently, better-off families have replaced the landlines with individual mobiles for all of their members. These phones are increasingly becoming signs of distinction and visible markers of socioeconomic inequality. Those who can afford them buy the most fashionable and expensive cell phones, which they use to take photos and to download video clips and songs. They may designate specific ring tones (which range from prayers by famous preachers to popular songs) for their various friends and colleagues. Those who are not able to acquire the most fashionable phones still manage to get used or out-of-style mobiles that enable them to stay in touch with their family members, friends, and relatives in different parts of Cairo and beyond. Ringing others is becoming a quick, easy, and cheap way of connecting.