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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HUSS)

**Biographies of Port-Said:
Everydayness of State, Dwellers, and Strangers**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Sociology, Egyptology, and Anthropology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology - Anthropology

by Mostafa Mohielden Lotfy

Under the supervision of Dr. Hanan Sabea
January 2018

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Abstract

The thesis examined how the social of the city of Port Said has been assembled, and how the spaces of the city have been produced through the practices of the dwellers and the state. I focused on the processes of the making and the transformation of the people and the city in specific moments. I focused on *al tahgeer* (the forced migration that followed the outbreak of the 1967 war and lasted until 1974), the declaration of the free trade zone in the mid-1970s, and the massacre of Port Said stadium in 2012.

The city of Port Said was built as part of the Suez Canal project. It is a “pure” case of crafting of a city from scratch; nothing was there before 25th April 1859, the date of the beginning of the Suez Canal construction. It has been always at the juncture between the global, the national and the local levels, where different networks of forces define what is Port Said. While wandering in the city, you can see the multilayers of history, which reflect the shifts in the history of modern Egypt, from the colonial to the national liberation to the neoliberal eras.

Through studying Port Said, I examined the process of the mutual formation and transformation of space and the social, focusing also on the temporality of these processes as the third dimension of my analysis.

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Introduction

I visited Port Said twice before conducting my fieldwork between August and December 2017. The first visit was in February 2013. As a journalist, I was covering the protests after the massacre of Port Said prison¹. I stayed only for 3 days covering this intense moment before getting back to Cairo with ambivalent feelings towards the city and its people. On one hand, the city was in a rebellious mood against police brutality and state authority; on the other hand, the city was full of the chauvinistic rhetoric about Port Said and skepticism toward the intentions of anyone from Cairo.

My second visit was illuminating for me. I went to Port Said in January 2016 to participate in the workshop *Ihky ya Tarekh*, which was organized by the history scholar Alia Mossallam. I stayed for a whole week learning and discussing the different narratives about Port Said, the different approaches to read and reconstruct history. By the end of this week, I decided to choose Port Said to be the topic of my thesis.

At that moment, Port Said was interesting to me for the following reasons. It is a “pure” case of crafting of a city from scratch; nothing was there before 25th April 1859, the date of the beginning of the Suez Canal construction. It is a novel city in comparison to other cities and villages in Egypt. It has been always at the juncture between the global, the national and the local levels, where different networks of forces define what is Port Said. While wandering in the city, you can see the multilayers of history, which reflect the shifts in the history of modern Egypt, from the colonial to the

¹ The massacre of Port Said prison refers to the killing of 46 individuals by police forces,

national liberation to the neoliberal eras. These were the reasons behind my choice of Port Said as my thesis topic.

In my thesis, I examined how the social of the city of Port Said has been assembled, and how the spaces of the city have been produced through the practices of the dwellers and the state. I focused on the processes of the making and the transformation of the people and the city in specific moments. I focused on *al tahgeer* (the forced migration that followed the outbreak of the 1967 war and remained until 1974), the declaration of the free trade zone in the mid-1970s, and the massacre of Port Said stadium in 2012.

To engage with these moments and processes of transformation, I was guided by Latour (the Actor Network Theory) and Lefebvre (the Production of Space) as two main academic interlocutors. Through the Latourian framework, I was able to see the importance of following the actors, their actions, and group formation/deformation, paying attention to non-human actors and their contribution to the process of reassembling the social. Reading Lefebvre side by side with Latour emphasized the fact that space is the precondition for the social to emerge, and simultaneously it is the product of this social emergence. Both theorists helped me to see the dialectical relationship between the social and space and how they reproduce each other. As much as the social is never constant -actors are merely actors because of their movements, groups are always under the condition of formation and deformation –space, in the same sense, is never constant. It is always in the making. It is always multiple, open with different meanings. That is what makes cities open-ended spaces, and always in the making. Reading Simone's (2004) work, *People as Infrastructure*, helped me to see

human networks as part of the infrastructure of the cities. Through these networks, the city is transformed, and without them the city is paralyzed. de Certeau widened my understanding of the spatial practices that contribute to the production of space. With de Certeau, I started to see the act of memorizing the past, telling stories, singing songs as spatial practices through which spaces are produced. Through Walter Benjamin's work, I started to understand history not as something that belongs to the past. Rather, it can exist only in the present, the now-time.

Through the conversation between fieldwork and theory, I started to see the different moments, which I chose to study, as moments that had simultaneously destructive and creative effects on the city and its people. On one hand, *Al tahgeer* was an act of dismantling the social fabric of Port Said and an act of liquidating the people's networks, but on the other hand, it triggered the process of reinventing the city in the imagination of the Port-Saidians. Further, *al tahgeer* ushered the process of reproducing the Port-Saidians as a group. The declaration of the free trade zone swept the old city of Port Said, ushering a massive social and spatial transformation, altering the modality of trading from sea trading to land trading, but it also allowed new networks to emerge, adding more layers to the city. The massacre of Port Said stadium had a catastrophic effect on the city, in terms of stigmatization of the Port-Saidians and the economic recession after the massacre, but it posed the question of what is Port Said, what defines it away from the massacre, motivating various initiatives such as *Port Said 'ala Qdemoh*² and

² *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* (Port Said as it was) is a local initiative that works on preserving the architectural heritage of Port Said. More about the initiative and its relationship with the massacre of Port Said stadium will be clarified in chapter four.

new *Simsimyah*³ bands, which contributed to the continuous processes of the making of the city.

In my research, I followed the movement of different actors in order to understand how the social was assembled in Port Said. I followed actors who were involved in different forms of trading in the city, from sea trading to land trading, after the declaration of the free trade zone in 1976 as a part of the open door policy *infitah*. While the sea trading modality was related to the Maritime traffic of the Canal and the foreign visitors to the city, the land trading was related to the local consumers who headed to Port Said to buy the imported goods that did not appear in other markets in Egypt at that time. I studied the two trading paradigms and how both of them produced the city and the social in two different ways. Also, I focus on *al tahgeer* (the forced migration) that happened after the six days war between Egypt and Israel, leading to the Israeli take over of the whole Sinai peninsula. The inhabitants of Port Said were evicted from the city, as well as the population of Ismailia and Suez, and diffused in the Egyptian cities and villages. The action of *al tahgeer* dismantled the social fabric, ushering a process of remaking the self and the other. During *al tahgeer*, there was a real threat to everything through which the Port-Saidinas identified their existence such as dwelling, working, and lifestyle. Then, they engaged in a process of reproducing themselves as a group, through constructing the members of the host communities as the other. I argue that *al tahgeer* was the moment that produced the notion of “Port-Saidiness” among the Port-Saidians, and its opposite, *al a’ghrab* (the

³ *Simsimyah* is a popular local collective singing genre in the Canal area, which is started in Port Said in 1930s. *Simsimyah* is the name of the musical string instrument which is used in this genre. More explanation about this topic will be introduced in chapter three and four.

strangers). The two notions still exist at present . Beside *al tahgeer* and forms of trading, I also focus on objects that absorbed the past in themselves, such as the instrument of *Simsimyah* and the old buildings from the colonial era. Both kinds of objects have come to be nodes of interactions and relations that have contributed to the social and spatial reproduction of the city, as I examine the process that unfolded after the stadium Massacre focusing on the different initiatives that aimed to redefine Port Said (see chapter four).

Port Said and the Suez Canal:

In this part, I offer an historical background about the building of Port Said in the nineteenth century, explaining the way in which spaces and populations were ordered. I rely on secondary sources to explain the spirit of that age, using mainly Foucault (2000) and Scott (1998) to explain the mentality behind building Port Said.

Port Said was built as part of the project of the Suez Canal in the nineteenth century. Unlike most of the Egyptian cities, towns, and villages, which have a very long history that goes back thousands of years, Port Said is only 158 years old. This state of novelty affords researchers a wide range of documents, photos, maps, memoirs and family collections, which constitute a treasure of traces of the social and its assemblage. The city was built out of nothing, representing a unique case of crafting of the social and the spatial. Arguably, each space is crafted through actual practices and political imaginations (Navaro-Yashin, 2012). In that sense, Port Said is not an exception. However, Port Said could be one of the extreme cases of crafting in comparison to other cities. The space itself did not exist before the

construction of the Suez Canal. There was merely a strip of land with a width of 40-50 meters between *Al Manzalah* Lake and the Mediterranean Sea (Ali Pasha Mubarak, 1886-88, p.26-30). This was the place to be known later as Port Said. The processes of ordering this place are different from the processes of re-ordering Cairo or any other established city that took place in nineteenth century. The fact of crafting a space from scratch enlarged the ability of the Canal Company to impose ordering and governing techniques in a totally empty space. It can be argued that this was the case also in Ismailia (which was built as an engineering base for construction works) and Suez (which is one of the oldest cities and ports on the Red Sea). However, Ismailia and Suez did not witness the same progress and development in comparison to Port Said. For instance, in 1882, the population of Port Said was 16560 inhabitants, while the population of Ismailia was 3364 inhabitants and the population of Suez was 10909 (Negm, 1987, p.54-55). In the same year, the number of foreigners in Port Said was 5867 inhabitants, while both Ismailia and Suez hosted 2126 inhabitants (ibid). These numbers indicate the capacity of Port Said to attract people from different nationalities, which led to the diversification of the actors that played different roles in shaping the city.

On 25th April 1859, a group of almost 100 men, mostly Egyptian workers, and few foreign engineers stood on a strip of land between *Al Manzalah* Lake and the Mediterranean Sea; the French diplomat and administrator of the project of the Suez Canal Ferdinand de Lesseps addressed the crowd. In his speech he hit the land with his mattock, announcing the beginning of the digging of the Suez Canal (Ali Pasha Mubarak, 1886-88, p.26-30). The workers started to erect the first row of tents

in the land that would be known later as Port Said (ibid). The city was expanded by filling *Al Manzalah* lake with the rubble that came out of the digging of the Canal (Negm, 1987). The inhabitants of the city were foreign and local immigrants from different countries around the world as well as different governorates around Egypt. They were people who participated in the digging of the Canal or immigrated to the new city, seeking new opportunities. In 1868, the population of the city was 2700 Egyptian men, and 6000 foreigners, excluding women, children and elders who were not able to work, so they were excluded from the statistics (p.53-54). In 1882, the population reached 10693 Egyptians and 5867 foreigners. Greeks constituted the biggest foreign community at that time with 2371 inhabitants. The second biggest community was the Italian with 1055 persons. The French were merely 780 people, the British reached 775, and the Austrians were 766 people. There were also other nationalities with fewer numbers such as Germans, Russians, Belgium, Iranians, Spanish, Dutch and Danish (p.55).

With the increasing migration from Europe to the Canal Zone, multiple religious missions accompanied European workers to the Canal cities. Unlike the common practices, religious missions were not seeking to increase their followers from among the “native” workers. Rather, they were helping Europeans with their religious duties and daily lives. “They not only managed places of worship, but also education and medical care” (Frémaux & Volait, 2009, p.256). The Company implemented a policy to finance and subsidize worship buildings of the various religious groups, including Muslims, who were the majority among the population of the Canal Zone, and most of this subsidy was in the form of land concessions (ibid).

This policy was meant to accommodate staff of any origin, but was also an efficient tool in the control of construction of places of worship. Every demand for subsidy required the submission of precise figures (size of community, number of Company's employees, etc.) and was to be accompanied with plans. Demands were treated favorably (and resulted in allowances or fringe benefits), once the need for a worship place had been agreed upon and after approval of the building's aesthetics had been given (Frémaux & Volait, 2009, p.256).

The same policy was implemented in relation to schools, which were built also on land concessions or by the Company itself (ibid).

According to the franchise agreements between the Egyptian state and the Universal Maritime Suez Canal Company, the latter was mostly responsible for the urban planning of Port Said (Negm, 1987). The company designed two neighborhoods, *al i'frang* and *al arab*. As it could be perceived from their names, the former was for the foreigners and the latter was for Egyptians. There was an empty land separating the two neighborhoods, and with time this empty land was inhabited. *Al i'frang* was built in a European architectural style with a prestigious French taste. Most of the hotels, department stores, casinos, restaurants, foreign banks, and companies were located on this side of the city. With the existence of various foreign communities, more consulate offices were opened, competing with Alexandria in the number of consulates. The company gave *al i'frang* streets foreign names, such as Ferdinand de Lesseps, Empress Eugenie, Thomas Waghorn and Francois Joseph. Other streets carried names of Ottoman and Egyptian rulers such as Sultan Murad, Sultan Othman, Said Pasha, Ibrahim Pasha, and

Khedive Tawfiq. The neighborhood was built on the west bank of the Canal to be the facade of the city: the first thing to be seen after leaving the Port, affecting the spectator with this impression of seeing a European city in the middle of the “oriental world”.

On the other side of the city, *al arab* neighborhood was hidden behind *al i'frang*, toward the west. Egyptians lived there in narrow wooden shakes during the early years of the city. However, with the repeated fires in the neighborhood, the Canal Company decided to enforce a new code to build houses in *al arab* using a mix of wood and bricks, to make the buildings more resistant to fire (Negm, 1987, p.37). Streets of *al arab* were narrower than the streets of *al i'frang*, and still are. Egyptians remained for years, suffering from the shortage of water supplies, until the Canal Company managed, first, to construct a pipeline to supply Port Said with fresh water from Ismailia in 1866, and second, to dig a freshwater canal from Ismailia to Port Said in 1895. The company also constructed a water treatment station, worked with sand filters, which supplied the city with drinking water until 1906 (ibid. p.43). However, even after solving the water issue, the Company was favoring *al i'frang* over *al arab*. While the former were allowed to use treated water at any time, the latter were allowed to use water only during the day (ibid). The streets of the neighborhood were named in a different way than *al i'frang*. It carried the names of the governorates and the cities from which Egyptian immigrants came, such as Minia, Sharqiyah, Aswan, Daqahliyah, Damietta, etc.

The Suez Canal Company implemented the Saint-Simonian spirit in planning Port Said, following the new approach of building and controlling cities in the nineteenth century (Frémaux & Volait, 2009). This new approach

implemented different governing techniques, and different mentality of ordering space and people, as it was described by Foucault (2000, p.349),

one can see the development of reflections upon architecture as a function of the aims and techniques of the government of societies. One begins to see a form of political literature that addresses what the order of a society should be, what a city should be, given the requirements of the maintenance of order; given that one should avoid epidemics, avoid revolts, permit a decent and moral family life, and so on.

James C. Scott (1998) argues that state and city planners attempted in their work to make any city legible, unlike old cities, which were unintelligible for strangers. Old cities evolved as forests. Their streets imitated the mobility of people and their activities, producing the city as a jungle that had its local logic, which was concealed for strangers. The latter could not navigate themselves in an old city without a local guide who knew the logic of the city. On the contrary, new cities were made of repetitive patterns that enabled the state or any stranger to “see” the city, to understand it, and to expect where to find what. Port Said was planned in that way, as a network of grids, with vertical streets (parallel to the Canal) and horizontal ones (parallel to the sea). Going further with Scott, he introduces the origin of the idea of grids in urban planning. Scott states,

The origin of grids or geometrically regular settlements may lie in a straightforward military logic. A square, ordered, formulaic military camp on the order of the Roman castra has many advantages. Soldiers can easily learn the techniques of building it; the commander

of the troops knows exactly in which disposition his subalterns and various troops lie; and any Roman messenger or officer who arrives at the camp will know where to find the officer he seeks (1998 p. 55).

Beside legibility, planning cities in grids aims to make them more governable, healthy, and prosperous (ibid. p.59). The city becomes more governable when it is easier for the state, or whoever governs the city, to count the number of people who live in each plot, quantifying spaces and dwellers, which makes the work of tax collectors, for instance, even easier. Further, moving from point A to point B when the city is produced in a grid shape, facilitates not only the movement of dwellers and merchandise, but also armies and police troops. Designing Port Said in a grid shape was intended to help the city remain healthy, as it allows fresh air and sunlight to infiltrate every location in the grid pattern, especially with the perpendicular streets on the sea and the Canal. The city becomes prosperous when it is legible, governable, quantifiable, and allowing mobility. With grids, space becomes ideal for selling and buying, “precisely because they are abstract units detached from any ecological or topographical reality, they reassemble a kind of currency which is endlessly amenable to aggregation and fragmentation” (Scott 1998 p.58). The planners of Port Said followed the same mentality, benefiting from the fact that the city was built from scratch.

Port Said was not an exception in adopting these new techniques in governmentality. Indeed, the nineteenth century was the moment of the wide implementation of these new techniques. In 1853, Louis Bonaparte hired Georges-Eugene Haussmann to take charge of the reconstruction of Paris, the work that lasted until 1869. The reconstruction of Paris included building

new wide and straight boulevards, aqueducts, much more effective sewage system, gas lines and lightning, new parks and public squares. Blocks of workers suburbs were removed from the inner city, pushed to the peripheries and penetrated by new roads to avoid any more Parisian proletarian insurgencies. Railroads and avenues were constructed to allow the quick mobility of the army from the barracks on the outskirts of Paris to the subversive districts (p.61). Similar policies were enacted in Cairo starting from the 1860s (Mitchell, 1991). Khedive Ismail also hired Haussmann to plan the area in the middle of Cairo, which would be known later as Downtown or Khedival Cairo, forging it in the same Parisian way. But, the most important attempt to reconstruct Cairo was the work that was done by Ali Pasha Mubarak, the head of the public works department from the late 1860s until 1890s. Mubarak visited Paris in the winter of 1867 and 1868 as part of a governmental mission. During the weeks he spent there, he studied the new systems of education and infrastructure, especially sewage system. After his return, Khedive Ismail appointed him as the Minister of Schools and the Minister of Public Works. And, for a decade, he worked on the reconstruction of Cairo on one hand and the building of a systematic modern educational system in Egypt, on the other. As it was mentioned by Timothy Mitchell (1991, p.63), “streets and schools were built as the expression and achievement of an intellectual orderliness, a school tidiness, a physical cleanliness, that was coming to be considered the country's fundamental political requirements”.

It was not the first time to “dispose” people and space in Egypt according to a “modern schema”. In 1846, the village of *Kafr Al-Zayat*, in the Nile Delta, was subjected to a reconstruction plan. The inhabitants of the

village were ordered to draw up a list of the families, the number of animals they had, and the different crafts in which they were engaged. According to this list, the village was rebuilt under the supervision of French engineers, who were charged with the “reconstruction of the villages of Egypt”. The villagers were moved into new standardized houses, where each family fits in a specific category according to the number of family members (quantification), and their social and economic status (standardization). The same plan was imposed on other villages in the Nile Delta (Mitchell 1991 p.44).

With the growing population of Port Said, more neighborhoods were built. On the eastern bank of the Canal, the Canal Company built Port Fouad district, which later on became the city of Port Fouad. And, on the west of *al arab*, *al manakh* neighborhood was established. The city was constituted of these four neighborhoods until the 1950s. Later, *al dawahy* (the suburbs) district was built on the south of *al i'frang*, *al arab* and *al manakh*. And, by the end of the 1970s, *al zohour*, which is the most populated neighborhood now, started to be built and expanded until *al manzalah* Lake. In 1975, President Sadat issued a decree No.651/1975 to add part of the rural villages of Ismailia governorate to Port Said, which was, until that moment, an urban governorate without any rural areas. Later, *al gharb* (the West) neighborhood was added to Port Said, which lies to the west of *al zohour*.

Walking through the city with a stranger's eye:

Walking through Port Said's streets always reveals a lot about the city. The naming of places and streets speaks of its multilayered history. Differences in architecture resemble the deeply rooted divisions between the

different neighborhoods. Voices of the city disclose silences in the narratives. An absence somewhere, exposes a presence somewhere else. During my fieldwork, I lived in Port Fouad, on the eastern side of the Suez Canal, few minutes from the ferry that links the two sides of Port Said. Most of my walks were in Port Said, regarding the fact that Port Fouad is a small district, in comparison to other neighborhoods in Port Said. However, walking in Port Fouad made me notice the various places that carry blue flags with the two characters (S.C.), announcing the ownership of these places by the Suez Canal Authority. The franchise agreement between Said Pasha, the ruler of Egypt between 1854 and 1863, and the Canal Company, secured the domination of the latter over the land of Port Said. This domination still can be seen in Port Fouad - even after the nationalization of the Company in 1956 - in the noticeable villas which are the residence of the Canal Authority employees, the coastal club, the clinic, the hospital, and the school; all of them are owned by the Suez Canal Authority.

Every morning, I left my house in Port Fouad, and walked to the ferry quay so that I can take one of the boats to reach the other side of the city. The ferry is also owned and run by the Canal Authority, and it works for free. As time passes, I started to notice that there are two different kinds of ferries. The first one is constituted of one deck in which cars, pedestrians, motorcycles, and bicycles gather in one place to cross the canal. There is a tower on the side of the ferry where the captain's cabin is located on the tower's top. Most of these old ferries have names such as "Port Said-1" or "Siani-2". The second kind of ferries is the "developed ones", which are bigger and have two decks : the first deck is for vehicles and the second is for

pedestrians. The captain's cabin is located on the roof of the second deck. In the pedestrians' level, the rows of seats are divided into three groups with three different colors: red, white and black, the colors of the Egyptian flag. On the side of the ferry, the slogan of Abdel Fattah Al Sisi's presidential elections campaign, "Long Live Egypt", is inscribed as the name of the ferry. And on the other side of the ferry, the logo of "the New Suez Canal" is drawn. Both kinds of ferries have national slogans but from different eras. "Sinai" and "Port Said" are related to the national liberation era - wars with imperialism in 1956 and Israel in 1967-1973, while "Long Live Egypt" is related to the Sisi's era when nationalism has no clear manifestations except for mega projects such as the "New Suez Canal".

Taking the ferry to Port Said, provided me with the opportunity to go through the experience of a foreign visitor who is watching the city from outside while gradually approaching Port Said. I can see the same line of buildings on the bank of the canal. Now, they are older and mostly abandoned but still intact: "Simon Arzt" - one of the oldest department stores in Port Said which was built in 1923 - is beside the abandoned building of the American Consulate, which was built in a similar design to the white house, yet much smaller. The latter is close to the old lighthouse, which is not in the middle of the water anymore. Now the lighthouse is surrounded by houses, after the natural expansions of the city over the sea. Along the same line of buildings, a block of similar houses, with noticeable decorated terraces stand on wooden beams. In one of these buildings, a spacious Indian food restaurant occupies the first two floors, with a modern front that is incompatible with the rest of the building. On the same line, other modern buildings and towers exist side by

side with the old ones. The ferry stops before a white building with a high tower which looks like a minaret. This building is the police station of the port. When the ferry gate opens, pedestrians, cars, motorcycles, and bicycles mix up together for few seconds, then they dissolve in the side streets. Later, the front yard of the police station retreats to its calm nature. To a great extent, the messy movement of everyone after getting off the ferry resembles the movement of the city of Port Said. Everything is located beside its opposite, sometimes over it, as it will be elaborated later.

After leaving the ferry, I walk down in *al thalatheeny* (the thirties) street which crosscuts the two neighborhoods of *al i'frang* and *al arab*. *Al thalatheeny* is not the official name of the street. Rather, it is the common name the people used to refer to Saad Zaghloul Street, which was de Lesseps Street at the beginning. The common name came from the width of the street (30 meters). Each street in *al i'frang* has a different name. The first is mostly related to the colonial, Ottoman and monarchical eras, while the second refers to one of the prominent Egyptian nationalist figures. Empress Eugenie Street turned to be Safia Zaghloul Street; Khedive Tawfiq turned to be Ahmed Oraby; Waghorn Street became Mostafa Kamel, although sometimes it has been referred to as *al tegarah* (trading) street. Some streets have third names after the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. Some of these streets were renamed again with names that related to the national liberation era and its symbols, such as the Republic street instead of King Fouad, and Shokry Al Qawatly instead of Francois Joseph.

The politics of street naming followed the changes of the dominant powers that ruled the country. During the first decades of the city, the Canal

Company named the streets of *al i'frang* in foreign names of European figures who attended the Canal inauguration or had strong ties to Ferdinand de Lesseps, as well as Ottoman and Egyptian rulers from Mohamed Ali's family. From the 1920s, names of nationalist figures were imposed by the state, instead of names indexing the colonial/Ottoman era. From the 1950s, the names which were related to colonial, ottoman and monarchical eras were wiped away from the official index of the streets and replaced by national liberation symbols, such as Salah Salem, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, and Abdel-Salam Aref. The antagonism between the old and new names is clear. The new names are imposed to decolonize the landscape of the city from the traces of the past, which is claimed to be wiped away. The politics of naming is a declaration from the side of the dominant party that the past has gone, today is another day, and the old has been defeated. As we can see in the "Make-Believe Space" by Navaro-Yashin, naming places is part of the phantasmatic crafting of spaces. And by using the adjective phantasmatic, she does not suggest that the crafting is a mere state of mind. Rather, the phantasmatic crafting is functioning in the materiality; "[it] is part and parcel here of the materiality of this manufacture, a process of making-and-believing, or believing-and making, at one and the same time" (Navaro Yashin, 2012, p. 6). But as Navaro-Yashin argues in her book, changing names cannot wipe away the past. It still can be found in the objects that remained from this past.

While walking in *al i'frang* street, I can notice the traces of the colonial architecture in the arcades of the buildings, the English and French signs of shops side by side with other new signs in Arabic, the Missionary schools such as College du Bon Pasteur, and the various churches of different sects

such as Maronite, Armenian, and Catholic. The landscape totally alters after crossing Mohamed Ali Street (officially *al shohadaa* street), which separates *al i'frang* neighborhood from *al arab*. Houses are smaller and side streets become narrower. Some of the old buildings are still intact, built of wood with a height of two or three floors maximum. However, most of them were replaced by concrete modern buildings. Even in these new buildings, the limitation of the land possessions is still obvious. One can find a high building standing on a very small piece of land, which makes it look like a straw that is made of concrete. The traces of the past are still obvious in the scene through the poverty of old wooden buildings and the smallness of land possession in the new concrete buildings, although the latter definitely costs a fortune. The old grids of *al arab* still define the possibilities of the present.

Walking toward the west takes us to *al manakh* neighborhood while walking toward the south takes us to *al dawahy* neighborhood. Both were almost rebuilt after the wars of 1956 and 1967. So, the austere architecture of social housing is dominant there. Gray concrete small houses can be seen everywhere. The names of *al manakh* streets also still have the traces of the national liberation era, such as *al galaa* (the independence), *al shaab* (the people), *al abtal* (the heroes), there is even a square that carries the name of Stalingrad (the Soviet city), signifying the relationship with the former Soviet Union during the Nasserist era. On the west of *al manakh*, we can find *al zohour* neighborhood. The construction of *al zohour* started in the 1970s to absorb the population growth. The effect of the Islamic current can be noticed there in the names of Islamic figures that were given to the blocks of houses, such as Omar Ibn Al-Khattab block, Othman Ibn Affan block, Belal Ibn Rabah

block, etc. The architecture of *al zohour* is mostly Egyptian modern architecture, such as what can be seen in new neighborhoods in Cairo: high towers with a lot of concrete. Heading to the west of *al zohour* will take us to the shore of *al Manzalah Lake*. But, we will not be able to see it because of the wall that was built on the western edge of the city, after the declaration of the free trade zone, to stop smuggling through the lake. Between *al zohour* and the wall, a squeezed district of literal shantytown lies there, called *ezzbet awlad ouf*.

During my fieldwork, I was always moving and meeting people in Port Fouad, *al i'frang* and *al arab* neighbourhoods, where most of the fragments which are related to my topic can be traced and reassembled. In the next chapter, I will discuss the conceptual framework and the methodology of the research.

Conceptual Framework

The Social, Space, and Time:

I was guided by Bruno Latour during my fieldwork and thesis writing, attempting to understand, through the framework of the Actor Network Theory, how the social formation can be traced. In his book *Reassembling the Social*, Latour (2005) criticizes the tendency to construct the social as a specific domain that is different from other non-social domains that can be studied by other disciplines. According to the approach he criticizes, the role of sociologists is to provide a “social explanation” of a human phenomenon that lies in one of these non-social domains, such as law, biology, media, management, economy, etc. The distinction between the social and the non-social is premised on another distinction between human subjects and non-human objects. For Latour, what went wrong in this schema is the perception of the social as a given, in no need for explaining, as if it works as a ready-made explanation that can be used to add a “social dimension” to the phenomena studied by other disciplines. What Latour suggests here is to bring Sociology back to what he perceived as its main objective: to explain the social rather than introducing it as an explanation in itself.

For Latour, the social is neither a given nor a specific domain. Rather, it is an association of “things that are not themselves social” (p.5), association in movement. The role of the sociologist is to follow the traces of these associations, to explain how the social is assembled. Latour suggests a working plan to follow the endless group formation processes, the actors who

contribute to the making of the social, and the actions of these groups and actors. This plan cannot be followed without doubting the certainties toward what constitutes a group, what can be perceived as an actor, and which motivations can be considered as “real motivations” that explain the actor’s action. A group here cannot be studied outside the processes of its formation and deformation. There is no such a group that exists by inertia; it exists only through the continuous process of excluding and including, defining its borders, and acting upon other groups. When a group is not forming itself, it means that it ceases to exist. To study a group means to study the traces of its association, assembling and formation. Additionally, following actors means to “catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands” (p.8). It is an attempt to find the order in which the social is assembled by these actors, instead of imposing a certain social order. Maximizing this “actor following plan” leads to include even non-human and immaterial actors, which also contribute to the association of the social. Latour is not the first theorist to emphasize the importance of non-human objects in constructing the social. However, in social constructionist imagination, objects can be conceptualized according to the meanings that are imposed on them by human subjectivities. Latour perceives non-human objects in a different way. He perceives them as actors by themselves (or actants, if they have no figuration yet), as long as they are able “to modify a state of affairs by making a difference” (p.71), which breaks the binary between human and non-human realms. Further, he suggests reconsidering the sources of actions that seem non-positivist enough or do not seem scientific for the researcher, as sources of action that

contribute to the actors' actions. It is not an attempt to take whatever is said by the actors as an explanation in itself, but it is an attempt to avoid imposing the researcher's metalanguage instead of listening to the metalanguage of the actors themselves. In other words, the Actor-Network Theory is all about questioning the readily-made classifications, categories and explanations of the social in favor of learning more from actors in the field, letting them guide the researcher.

There were a number of different reasons behind my choice to use the Actor Network Theory in my research. First, following the Latourian approach gives more weight to the actors; voices, allowing me to put voices in the field (theorists) and voices from the field (interlocutors) on the same level of priority. One of the reasons ethnography can be a powerful tool to describe the social is this close encounter between the researcher and the interlocutors. This encounter should not be spoiled by prioritizing voices of the theoretical interlocutors over voices of the field interlocutors, as if academics constantly know how to explain the social and the field interlocutors are merely tools and material to verify the intellectual analysis. The presence of the social is always formed anew. Demonstrating it should then reflect this essence, which cannot happen without listening carefully in the field. Secondly, during my fieldwork, it was obvious that objects – such as the sea, the canal, the colonial architecture (debris of the past), and *Simsimyah* (the traditional music instrument in Port Said) – are actors, in the sense that they can change a state of affairs by creating difference. It was impossible either to neglect or to reduce them to mere projections of human subjectivities, as will

be explained in the following chapters. Finally, following the actors, their actions and group formations allowed me to examine how the social history of the city — the ways through which the social is reassembled — does not follow exactly the schema of the national narrative about the modern history of Egypt. Indeed, the city went through major transformations from the colonial to the national liberation to the neoliberal eras, which are the main phases of the history of Modern Egypt from the late nineteenth century to the present. However, there is no clear-cut boundary among these phases, and traces of the past can always be found in the present.

The relationship between the social assemblage and the production of space is substantial. We cannot talk about group formations, actor movements and objects' affects without analyzing the relationship between these and the space they exist and interact within. For Lefebvre (1991), this space cannot be theorized as a mere container of these processes and interactions. Rather, it is the precondition for the social to emerge, and simultaneously the product of this social emergence. This dialectical relationship between the space and what produced (and is produced by) this space creates the possibility to have what Lefebvre called the social space. The latter cannot be reduced to a mere thing or object among other objects. Rather,

[space] subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity — their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. [...] Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting

others and prohibiting yet others. Among these actions, some serve production, others consumption (p.73).

From the 1970s onward, this argument was pushed further by geographers, urbanists, and anthropologists to theorize space as the social laboratory where social relations are produced on one hand, and space — as a product — is also shaped and transformed by social relationships on the other. For instance, David Harvey (2012) focused on class-based struggle and the role of capitalism in the production of the urban space on one hand, and the attempts to reappropriate space by grassroots associations that resist the capitalist-imposed plans on the other. Michel Foucault (1975) takes another historical approach to understand the development of social control mechanisms by studying the relationships between the human body, spatial arrangements, and power. For Foucault, space turns to be political through the spatial arrangements that are imposed by the state to control individuals and their behaviors, aiming to create them as “docile bodies” at the end. Michel de Certeau (1984) started from a different point of departure, considering the everyday life of the people in the space, the ways of operating, consuming, naming, using, and narrating these spaces as ways not only to negotiate with socio-political discipline, but also to reproduce the spaces through consuming them. One point has to be mentioned here, in all of these approaches space is not neutral. Besides being shaped by the various actors and the interrelationships among them, it opened the possibility for these actors to maneuver, negotiate and contest the webs of the relationships that created them.

In Port Said, we can see how the social space was produced, for instance, through the relationship between the foreigners and the locals, manifesting itself in the territoriality of these two groups in two neighborhoods, *al i'frang* and *al arab*, which tell two different yet complementary stories about the City. *Al i'frang* (the foreigners' neighborhood) was the facade of the city that was built using European architecture, while *al arab* (the Egyptians' neighborhood) was pushed away and hidden behind *al i'frang*, following the superior/inferior relationship between the foreigners and the locals (the Port-Saidians) in the city during the colonial era. Another example from the same era is the Suez Canal Company, which was not a mere workplace, but also a space of interactions between the two groups — the foreigners and the locals. The Suez Canal Company as a space was also created by the superior/inferior relationship between the two groups, reproducing and maintaining this relationship by administrative rules and the different social statuses of the Company employees, which kept the foreigners in the higher managerial positions, while Egyptians were in the lower positions of manual labour, as it will be explained later.

What is important in studying space is not looking at the things that are encompassed by it, but rather, it is the uncovering of the social relationships embedded in it. Lefebvre (1991, p.89) argued against what he called the dominant tendency to fragment the space, cutting it up into pieces and enumerating the objects that the space contains. He attributed this tendency to the professional specializations that follow the capitalist social division of labor, in the sense that architects are assigned the architectural space,

economists are responsible for the economic space, etc. As much as Latour (2005) argues that studying the social assemblage is what should be the focus of the social sciences, Lefebvre (1991) also argues that the production of space is what should be studied, not the things in the space. He explains:

Thus, instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it — relationships which introduce specific contradictions into production, so echoing the contradiction between the private ownership of the means of production and the social character of the productive forces — we fall into the trap of treating space as space 'in itself, as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so to fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider 'things' in isolation, as 'things in themselves' (p.90).

The last argument explains why it was difficult for me to study the Suez Canal Authority and the Free Trade Zone in isolation from the whole city. Hence, my research shifted to become a quest to follow the movements of the various actors, objects and their affects in the different spaces of the city. For instance, the working life of the Egyptian employee in the Suez Canal Company/Authority cannot be isolated from his social life in *al arab* neighborhood. The study of the Free Trade Zone as a field of interactions cannot be conducted without paying attention to its interrelationship with the work related to the sea and the Canal as another field of interactions. The

cultural representations of the city, such as *Simsimyah* songs and heritage buildings, cannot be understood without being theorized as products of the social relations on one hand, and nodes of reproducing the relationships between the city and its different groups of dwellers on the other. Seeing the city as a whole can be the most difficult task, which most of the time goes beyond the capacity of the researcher, but remains necessary to understand and explain the space and the social in their movements.

With the diversity of the types of interactions and interrelations among actors and things in the space, we are not faced here by a singular social space, but by multiple spaces which do not exist juxtaposed with one another but in relations of interlocution, combination, or superimposition (p.86). This can be seen in the relationship between the local, national, and global spaces. No one of the latter abolishes the others. Rather, they exist in relationships with one another, as Lefebvre articulates, “This is not a consequence of the law of uneven development, but a law in its own right. The intertwining of social spaces is also a law” (ibid). Port Said is the product of the relationships among the local, the national, and the global. It has always been as such due to its geographical location and its relationship to the Mediterranean and the Canal. The three levels of spaces are always there, and can be noticed, for instance, in the different ways of naming street. In *al i'frang* neighborhood, streets had been given names of political figures related to the colonial era, such as European and Ottoman rulers, and figures from the Egyptian Royal family. Later, these names were wiped out and replaced by names of figures related to the nationalist movement. In *al arab* neighborhood, the streets

carried the names of Egyptian governorates and cities, which were the points of origin for the Egyptian dwellers of Port Said at the beginning of the city. Another example of the relationships among the local, the national, and the global spaces is the port itself, which works as a node of interaction between the local and global in a realm that is controlled by the nation state but not limited to it.

Some theorists differentiate between the production and the construction of space. Setha M. Low (1996) argues that the social production of space includes the historical, technological, socio-political, and economic processes that lead to the physical creation of the space, while the social construction of the space is related to the phenomenological and symbolic experience of the people who use this space in their everyday lives, and so through using it they transform it (p.861). Although this argument sounds rational, I do not entirely agree with it. I cannot see a clear division between the production and the construction of space, as if we are talking about two phases of the space's history. There is also a phenomenological experience during "the creation" of the space by those who witnessed and participated in the production process. Mossallam (2012) in her dissertation about the "Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt 1956-1973" relied on the popular songs of the High Dam builders and their memories to re-narrate the process of the construction of the High Dam and producing it as a national symbol. She engaged with the everydayness of the lives of the builders to explain how the High Dam was socially and culturally produced as such. The process of the social production of space does not cease to exist by the end of its creation.

The technological, socio-political, and economic processes that created the space will continue to shape it side by side with the “users” or “consumers”. Hence, social space is always in the making.

Besides conceptualizing space and the social, thinking of time was a major question in my research. Conducting a study about bygone moments was challenging to me: how to represent these moments that belong to the past? However, during my fieldwork, I realized that the past does not cease to exist in the present, not in the form of documents that preserve it, but in the traces that remain in the imagination and materiality of my interlocutors’ lives, in the landscape of the city in forms of rubbles and ruins, in the relationships that construct the social, and in forms of affect that are triggered by the traces of the past. People who used to work as *bamboutyah* were often showing me gifts they received from foreign sailors and passengers to prove that, at one point in time, they belonged to something greater than the locality of Port Said, to show that they were part of a universality that is absent in the present moment. Traces of the colonial history of the city still exist in the landscape of the city: in the names of streets, the grid planning of the city, and old houses with European architecture. Notions of *al a’ghrab* (the strangers) and real Port-Saidians evolved in the past and still exist in the relationships among dwellers of the city. The past still exists in the affect of all of these traces, “the variation of someone’s force of existence,” as it was stated by Deleuze (1978) while describing Spinoza's concept of affect.

To conceptualize the coexistence of past and present, I will call on Veena Das and her reflections on the descent of the eventually into the

ordinary. In her book *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Das (2007) reflects on her work on two violent moments: the partitioning of India in 1947, and the assassination of the then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. She posed questions about the relationship between these two violent moments as critical events, and the everyday life pre and post these events. Along with her intellectual journey, she has attempted to answer the question of “what happens to the subject and the world when the memory of such events is folded into the ongoing relationships?” (p.8). I will answer the question through her words:

My engagement with the survivors of riots also showed me that life was recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through the descent into the ordinary. There was, I argue, a mutual absorption of the violent and the ordinary so that I end up by thinking of the event as always attached to the ordinary as if there were tentacles that reach out from the everyday and anchor the event to it in some specific ways (ibid. p.8).

In my fieldwork, I tried to find these traces of the eventual in the ordinary. For instance, *al tahgeer* (the forced migration) was a moment of evacuating almost the entire population of Port Said following the Six-Day War between Egypt and Israel in 1967. I started my fieldwork and even the chapters of my thesis at this moment, knowing that it was a moment of major transformation for the city and its people. However, I did not expect to find it still vivid until the present moment, in forms of state documents that were produced at that time and are still alive and usable until now, and the processes of the making of the self (Port-Saidians) and the production of the other (*al a'ghrab*) that took

place during *al tahgeer* and its reflection on the relationships in the present. I was astonished by following how the event of *al tahgeer* was absorbed in the ordinary life that came after it, and how the life that preceded the years of *al tahgeer* was also absorbed in the years of the migration, as will be explained in the following chapter. The past is traveling through time. A document, a memory, a song, or a relationship is the vehicle.

The notions of the traveling past and the coexistence of past and present can be further emphasized by calling Walter Benjamin to the stage. Benjamin perceives the past as a rupture of the now-time. For him, history is not the homogenous and empty time that historicism preaches. On the contrary, it is the rupture that can disrupt the now-time, opening the possibility of redemption. Historicism constructs history as a thread of moments that always move toward progression and are moved by it. For historicism, the past is a bygone moment that can be studied merely in its position in the thread of time. It belongs to another territory that has nothing to do with the now-time. It existed once and cannot exist again outside its order in the thread of the bygone moments. On the contrary, in Benjamin's fifth thesis on history, he sees the possibility to seize the past "only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (Benjamin, 1969a). For him, the past can exist in the present, in the instant time. Benjamin was trying to emancipate history from the concept of progression, perceiving the notion of progress as part of the identification of history with the victorious. Rather, he was calling for another history: historical materialism, a concept forged by Marx focusing mainly on the voices of the oppressed in history, making it vivid and alive in the present. Through this, the past can be

emancipatory as long as it disrupts the present, and can open up to new possibilities.

Theorizing history as emancipatory and full of possibilities challenges the traditional way of thinking of history as a complete event related to the past and which can be revealed merely as it was. In Benjamin's sixth thesis of history, he clarified that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it the way it was. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (ibid). The memory here does not come in the form of information as in the historian's work or daily press. Rather, it comes in the form of a story, an experience which is full of affects. The experience here is what all the storytellers draw on, not the information. The storyteller tells his experience or the experiences of other people, while the audience absorbs these experiences, interacts with them, and adds to them, as Benjamin explains in his work about the storyteller (1969b). In that sense, the story is not owned by the storyteller, it is not complete, it is always open to other fragments from those who listen to it. Benjamin (ibid) distinguished the novel from all other forms of prose literature — such as fairy tales, the legend, and novella — by underlining that the novel neither comes from oral tradition nor goes in that direction. It lacks the quality of interaction and collectivity in the storytelling. It is produced by the solitary novelist, rather than the wandering storyteller. Drawing on that, my interlocutors are not only actors in the Latourian sense who contribute to the reassembling of the social and the production of space, but also storytellers who transmit their experiences and memories about the past through their stories. They are authors of the history

of their own city. Each one of them has a fragment of the story. Collecting these fragments does not make this thesis, or any other thesis, a “complete” story about the past. On the contrary, the story will always be incomplete, open to more fragments, even by the readers. The past will keep reinventing itself, disrupting the present.

The past in Port Said manifests itself in the materiality of objects that absorbed a specific period of time in themselves, such as old buildings and *Simsimyah*. These objects create affect, to be actors, from the time which is absorbed in them, not as antiques but as living objects. Around these two kinds of objects — old buildings and *Simsimyah*— there is a lot of politics. On the one hand, there is the effort to revive the old buildings as the architectural heritage of the city, protecting it from being demolished, and on the other there are also the attempts to revive *Simsimyah* as part of the significance of the Port Said. Both are objects that derive their importance from the world when they were created. Both are parts of the past that still exist in the present, not as a dead past but as a living one. At this juncture, let me call on Gaston Gordillo and his work *Rubles and the Afterlife of Destruction* to help me theorize this existence of the past in the present. In his book, Gordillo (2014) argues that the elite of any society have a sort of sensitivity toward rubles that remain from the destruction of the “old world” by forces of colonialism, modernism, capitalism, neoliberalism, etc. Rubles are signs of wiped-away worlds. They always signify the destruction that happened and need to be hidden. Hence, the elite begin to make efforts to turn rubles into ruins. By ruins, Gordillo means “dead things from dead past, whose value

originates far in time” (p.9). Ruins separate rubles from the present, deprive them of the afterlife of destruction, and turn them into a mere fetish, i.e, the heritage that needs to be preserved and reserved. In my research, I engage with this argument, situating *Simsimyah* and the old buildings of Port Said within this debate about ruins and rubbles, as it will be explained in the following chapters.

Mediterranean port cities and cosmopolitanism:

Most of the studies that tackle Eastern Mediterranean port cities and their societies describe these cities as cosmopolitan, especially between the 1850s and the 1950s. During the second half of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire was totally integrated in the global economy, ushering wide and radical social and urban transformations in the Eastern Mediterranean cities, which still belonged to the Ottoman Empire until the 1920s. During this period, the Mediterranean port cities were “exposed to intensive exchange with the economically and militarily successful states of Western and Central Europe, thus catalyzing a series of institutional innovations, identity formation processes and migrations” (Fuhrmann & Kechriotis, 2009, p.72). Eastern Mediterranean port cities turned to be nodes for exchanging goods, values, and ideas with the rest of the world, but also with each other, allowing a common experience of urbanity and sociality among these cities (ibid). This common experience is often labeled as a cosmopolitan experience.

The concept of cosmopolitanism itself is contested. The word is used to refer to various characteristics of Eastern Mediterranean port cities: the coexistence of various ethno-religious groups and the conviviality among

them, the economic interrelations among these cities through the commercial bourgeoisie, the adoption of the western lifestyle and values, the growth of commercial capital, the density of the population and the urban development of these cities (Gekas, 2009). These characteristics were used to emphasize the dichotomy between the countryside/interior and the town/coast (Eldem et al as cited in Driessen, 2005). In general, it was argued that the citizens of the Mediterranean port cities felt more affinity toward each other than the people of the inner cities (e.g. Driessen, 2005). However, different approaches were developed to analyse the cosmopolitanism of Eastern Mediterranean port cities. Earlier historiographies focused on the emergence of the commercial bourgeoisie in these cities as a manifestation of the economic expansion of the European empires — mainly Britain, France, and Germany — at the expense of the economic hegemony of the Ottoman empire (Gekas, 2009, p.96). Gekas argues for instance that the merchants, who were from various ethno-religious groups and with their commercial relations to the European capitals and the established network among Mediterranean port cities, played the major role in giving the Mediterranean ports this cosmopolitan characteristic (ibid). It was debatable whether the merchants of these cities constituted class or interest groups, comprador merchants or commercial bourgeoisie, and were pro-nation state or adversaries to it (ibid). With the increasing influence of linguistics in the social sciences, more historians tended to abandon class as an analytical tool, and replaced it with the category of “community and ethnicity” (ibid). Gekas (2009) adds that, more recently, cosmopolitanism ceased to be the characteristic of a certain class or ethno-religious group. Rather, it became an overarching ethos of the Eastern

Mediterranean cities and their societies in general. After the dispersal of the non-Muslim ethno-religious groups from the Ottoman empire to other countries and continents, starting from the 1920s, more studies were added to this literature of cosmopolitanism by focusing on the same groups in the diaspora and their attempts to identify themselves as cosmopolitan citizens (urbanized, multilingual, and open-minded) against the parochiality of the locals in the cities of diaspora (Driessen, 2005, p.135). For instance, Ilay Romain Ors (2006) conducted an ethnography of the Rum polities, a Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox Istanbul-born group of people who were displaced mostly to Athens, where the ethnography was conducted. The researcher argues that the Rum polities distinguish themselves from the other Greeks in Greece through “a notion of cultural distinction,” which asserts itself in their everyday life, cultural production and social organizations. The Rum polities still define themselves through the relationship to the cosmopolitan past of Istanbul as a source of identity (p.vi).

Malte Fuhrmann (as cited in Gekas, 2009, p.102) attempts to define cosmopolitanism according to four characteristics: “1) a publicly visible diversity; 2) an ability of individual or collective agents to navigate between different coded spheres; 3) an active practice of sociabilities that cross community borders; and 4) a belief and a policy of enhancing cohesion without a monolithic base.” However, Driessen (2005, p.137) argues that the concept of cosmopolitanism remains vague, underlying four factors that complicate the use of the word cosmopolitanism as an analytical category:

First, ambiguity is inherent to cosmopolitanism as it aims to reconcile difference with equality and universal values with pluralism. [...]

Second, there is a problematic relationship between cosmopolitanism and power. It is mostly embraced by political, economic and cultural elites as part of their cultural domination. Third, [...] there are several cosmopolitanisms, each of them reflecting ideologies, forms of integration and ways of life from different historical periods. And fourth, tolerance of Otherness as a key cosmopolitan value is double-faced. It has a weaker or passive form in the sense of “non-interference with difference” and a stronger or active one in the sense of “promoting sympathy for and empathy with different ways of life”.

Driessen even problematizes the concept of cosmopolitanism by questioning the dichotomy between the port cities and hinterlands. He argues that not all of the people of port cities were affected by the flow of cultures, ideas and values that came from the port with the intensive maritime activities or from the ethno-religious diversity in the city itself. Also, not all of the people who lived in the hinterland turned their backs towards the sea.

Since its establishment in 1859-69, Port Said has been part of this network of Mediterranean port cities, having the same diversity of ethno-religious groups who lived there and played a major role in its urban development and commercial activities, until the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. However, Port Said did not attract the same attention to its version of cosmopolitanism in comparison to Alexandria, which dominated the narrative about cosmopolitanism in Egypt and Eastern Mediterranean port cities⁴.

⁴ See also the work of Hala Youssef Halim Youssef (2004), *The Alexandria Archive: An Archeology of Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism*. In her dissertation, the author highlighted two central problems with the dominant narrative of cosmopolitan Alexandria: the Eurocentric approach to historiography and canon formation that

Comparison between the reconstruction of Alexandria and the building of Port Said in the middle of the nineteenth century can be made to understand the emerging conditions of the notion of cosmopolitanism in both cities, a further quest to be followed in the future, focusing mainly on the emergence and transformation of both cities in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

Although my research focuses on a later era when multi-ethnicity has vanished with the nationalization of the city, traces of the discourse of the cosmopolitan Port Said still exists in the city. None of my interlocutors used the word cosmopolitanism. However, there was always this referral to the existence of the foreigners in the previous eras and their influence in shaping the ethos of Port Said as a city that belongs to something bigger than the local, more urbanised, developed, and open towards the world and the European lifestyle. A lot of my interlocutors, while remembering *al tahgeer*, emphasized how they were different, in their behavior and lifestyle, than the people of the host communities in the inner cities, attributing this to the influence of the foreigners on Port Said and its culture. Also, *al bamboutyah*, who were not part of the elitist commercial bourgeoisie, which is multilingual and has wide relations with European capitals and the Mediterranean ports network, still define themselves as part of an open world that is mediated by the sea. Their relationship with the port life, the passengers and sailors passing by the City, and the port is what defined their existence, giving them

omits the Arab element from the story, and the inadequate approach to the materiality of Alexandria as it is featured in the writings about it. The author analyzed the representations in the work of Constantine P. Kavafy, E. M. Forster, Lawrence Durrell, and Edward al Kharrat.

this feeling of the affinity toward something beyond the boundaries of the local. Further, there are currently attempts to preserve the colonial architecture of the buildings in *al i'frang* neighborhood as part of the “identity” of the city and what makes Port Said unique.

I argue that in these cases of remembering the cosmopolitan past of the city, defining oneself by the relationship with the port life, and preserving colonial architecture, cosmopolitanism goes beyond nostalgia toward the past. It is a reconstructed concept, an attempt to reproduce the city and the self by relying on the debris of the past. The representational spaces, which are produced during the colonial era of Port Said such as squares, hotels, theaters, churches, and mission schools, side by side with the memories of my interlocutors about the cosmopolitan past are used to reconfigure the present. Cosmopolitanism here is not similar to the cosmopolitanism of the late 19th century and early 20th century. It is a new version made by new social associations, where Port-Saidians play the major role in constructing the cosmopolitan imagination about Port Said, as will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis.

The city and the everyday practices:

Why does paying attention to everyday practices occupy such importance in studying cities? I found the answer in de Certeau’s explanation of the difference between place and space. For de Certeau (1984, p.117), “a place is the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence.” In that sense, the place indicates a state of stability, “an instantaneous configuration of positions,” while space is

composed of the intersections of the movements of these elements, the relationships among them, the harmony and contradictions of their movements. In other words, “space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (ibid). The movements to be considered are not merely the physical movements in space. Practices like telling stories, naming places, and narrating the past are also movements. With narratives about the past, we move through time. When these stories about the past are told or recalled while wandering the same locations where they took place in the first instance, the movement here becomes a movement through times and spaces of the past and the present. Stories about places and narratives about the past bridge various times and spaces, fusing them into new social and spatial realities. When someone describes for another person the way to go to a certain place, they usually give them navigational tips, such as, “Don’t take this street during the day. It will be crowded because there are a lot of governmental buildings,” or “Don’t walk in this street at night. It’s really risky.” The street here is not solely a place. It is a social and personal experience, which is conveyed through these simple sentences, producing social and spatial realities. These ordinary everyday practices produce what we call the city.

Tanya Richardson (2005) followed the walks of the members of “My Odessa Club” in the streets of the Ukrainian port city of Odessa, where a group of 20-30 residents were gathering on a street in “old Odessa” every Sunday to walk and talk about histories and stories of the places they passed by. Through the walks, frequent stops, shared stories about the passed-by

places, and the conversations with local residents, Richardson argued that the walkers were mapping and disputing the history, linking it to places, intruding into the present, encountering the past, reviving absences, and making the self through generating a sense of the city and its history as a whole. Although these walks were different than the everyday practices of de Certeau, they were still spatial practices that produced spaces through the operations of walking and talking. Another example of spatial practices that contributed to the production of space and the social is Mark F. Hau's (2016) work on marking space and making place in Barcelona. In this city, which is contested between Spain's central government and Catalan nationalists, the act of restoring the four iconic columns — originally constructed in 1919 with the intention of being the national symbols of a new Catalan golden age — to their place in front of the National Art Museum of Catalonia was perceived as more than a construction of a monument or a change in the landscape. Rather, it was a spatial practice that emphasized the identity of space, a re-appropriation of “a Catalan place that Spain had sought to eliminate” (p.82) as it was seen by the Catalan nationalists. Mark F. Hau proceeded with analysing other spatial practices that contributed to the making of space, such as raising Catalan flags and spraying graffiti of Catalan symbols on the walls of the contested city.

In AbdouMaliq Simone's work, he emphasizes the importance of the everyday interactions of the people in the inner cities, extending the notion of infrastructure to the people's activities in the city (Simone, 2004). Through these activities, people are able to make cities, which are seen as “dysfunctional or incomplete,” functioning. He argues that the people are able

to engage complex combination of objects, spaces, persons, and practices to reproduce life in the city. He gives an example of the transport depot of Abidjan, which is full of steerers, taxi drivers, baggage loader, etc. When a steerer approaches a passenger, he makes a quick assessment of his wealth, status, and needs. So, the steerer will know where to take the passenger, who is the best baggage loader to load his baggage, which taxi driver should take him, etc. Without guiding rules, all of these people in this heterogeneous network work together, relying on their knowledge of the space in which they interact. Simone elaborates by saying that through people's activities, specific spaces "are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at given places and times" (p.409). This collaboration and collectivity (and also heterogeneity) open the possibility for the people to produce something in and with the city that is different than what is determined by the dominating powers, while still functioning within the same power domains. Here is where Simone meets de Certeau while the latter talks about tactics of the everyday. These tactics or operations occur in a place, such as the street, which was planned by urbanists for a specific reason and to serve a specific aim. However, the daily operations of the people can make something different and unpredictable with this place, but still within the same dominating structures of this place.

Methodology and Positionality:

In my fieldwork, I relied on oral history, family collections, in-depth interviews, and archival ethnography. I was visiting Port Said almost every

week from the beginning of August to the end of December 2016. In each visit, I stayed for three to four days in the city. In the first month, I followed the snowball methodology (one interlocutor sending me to another, and so on), without forcing a specific order on my fieldwork (whom to meet and why), and without forcing a specific structure on my interviews. I was simply focusing on listening, building rapport, and following my interlocutors. By the end of August, I started to have a map of interlocutors covering different areas in my research, while other areas of interest were still missing. Hence, I started to take the lead, asking my main interlocutors to introduce me to specific people who can cover the various areas of interest in my research. I then started to have semi-structured interviews with 15 interlocutors from different backgrounds and ages. Most of the time, I did not use recording machines, trying to avoid the formal setting of interviews. I met my interlocutors in the evening, using scratch notes to highlight the most important points in the interview. I then documented the interviews in my field notes after finishing them. I spent the mornings walking in the city, taking notes about the different places I passed by.

The variety of the interlocutors resembles the differences of the actions I followed, such as sea trading, land trading, *Simsimyah*, and heritage activities. The variety of ages of my interlocutors allowed me to cover the different phases of the city, from the 1950s and 1960s when sea trading was the main action in assembling the social, to the *al tahgeer* period between 1967 and 1974-76, into the 1970s when the free trade zone started and the trading paradigm shifted. The conversations with the younger interlocutors

gave more emphasis on the current encounters with the city, its history and the ongoing processes of assembling the social. Although I was aware of the importance of listening to various voices, I had limited access to female voices in the city, something that assuredly affected my research, but engaging with the snowball methodology constrained my accessibility to women in the city. I had the opportunity to access the records of the City Council, which covers the period from December 1975 to August 1976, in the governorate's archive. My first intention was to proceed with reading these records up through the end of the 1970s. However, my permission to access the archive was suddenly canceled by the secretary of the governor after two days, and I was "gently" asked to leave the archive office. Besides working with the official archive, I collected 12 issues of local magazines that were published in Port Said from 1976 until 1995. The magazines' issues provided me with numerous insights about the city and its transformations. Besides following these specific methods, during my stay in Port Said I tried to walk as much as my legs were able to carry me, talk to people as much as they were open to talk, and listen to the city as much as it disclosed itself.

Through the process of conducting this research my positionality shifted at different times. I was always wearing different hats during the last years of my life. Starting from 2005 to 2012, I had a sort of political engagement as a political activist in different leftist groups and parties. Then, I shifted totally to journalism, and it turned to be my way of engagement with the political. However, while I was stepping into the field, I was not able to see the political in my topic. I did not see in my topic anything more than an interesting social historical study about Port Said, which is an understudied

city in comparison to Cairo or Alexandria. I was thinking of my work as important only for those who want to know about Port Said, and nothing more. Later, with the last phases of writing my thesis, I started to see how this topic can be related to other cases by making Port Said speak to other places through the different themes that posed themselves in this research. For instance, studying *al tahgeer* in Port Said explains what kind of processes take place after the act of displacement, what kind of relationships evolve between the displaced people and the place they came from and the place to which they are relocated, and how they reproduced themselves in the new places. In that sense, the experience of *al tahgeer* can be related to other cases of displacement in the region, such as the Syrians, the evacuees from North Sinai in the last two years, and even the people of the *Maspero* triangle in Cairo⁵. Another example of how we can make Port Said speak to other places is by understanding the notion of the strangers, *al a'ghrab*, the negative image of the people of the city. *Al a'ghrab* is one of the themes that kept appearing in my research. It can tell us a lot about the politics of belonging and othering, which also take place in other places, what defines who belongs to the place and who is not, what constitutes this *ghareeb* (stranger), and why we always need to produce this *ghareeb* in each place. Other examples are *Simsimyah* gatherings and *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* walks. Both practices have the ability to generate various forms of socialization. They are more than cultural products. Rather, they are social practices that contribute to the reassembling of the social and the production

⁵ I am referring here to the project of “developing” the *Maspero* triangle district in the heart of Cairo, which led to the displacement of most of the dwellers. For more information, read “Development ‘alternatives’ raise fear of forced relocation from Maspero Triangle” (Mohie & Ahmed, August 21, 2017).

of space. This can be related to other minor practices in other places that do not seem that influential in defining the city, but actually are. With this new understanding of my topic and its relationship to other cases, I began to see the political in my research.

The shift in my positionality also reflected on my voice as an author. In the first chapters of this thesis, the reader can notice a voice of “unengaged” scholar, trying to understand and interpret the events he is talking about. In the last chapter and the conclusion, my voice shifted to be the voice of the engaged scholar. This happened as a result of the new relationship with my topic that evolved during the months of fieldwork and writing. I prefer to leave this alteration of my voice as evidence of how research can change the researcher, and vice versa. Through this journey, I have learnt to look at other places through the lens of what I have learnt from Port Said. During my fieldwork, I started to understand that the city is the most intimate level of practicing politics. The city is what we create and what creates us. I have learned that there are two approaches to read and organize cities; one is a top-down approach, and the other is the opposite. While the top-down approach creates the city as the state’s or capital’s project, the bottom-up approach creates the city as the people’s project. Through following actors, their actions and networks, I was trying to understand Port Said as the people’s project, the people’s artifact. My hope was that, through this approach of reading cities from bottom to top, not only would alternative knowledge about cities be developed, but also that an alternative politics toward the spaces that make us and are made by us can evolve.

Chapter 1:

Al Tahgeer: The production of the self and the other

(1)

When Hajj Rizq started to hear the terrifying voices of the anti-craft artillery shells, he realized that the Egyptian army was defeated in the war with Israel, he was 17 years old at that time. “It was obvious that the enemy was coming closer to the city, and we [the Egyptian Army] were not at the gates of Tel Aviv, as the radio was propagating,” he said. The anti-craft artillery was trying to keep the Israeli aircraft away from Port Said, securing the retreat of the Egyptian soldiers from Sinai. This was one or two days before former President Gamal Abdel-Nasser gave his televised speech on June 9th, 1967, admitting the defeat in the Six Days War⁶.

For Abbas, who was 35 years old in 1967, the experience was different; he needed more time to understand what happened, although he was a member of the National Guard⁷. Two weeks before the outbreak of the war, his unit was relocated to a camp in *Al Qantra*, a small village in Ismailia governorate, to defend the village, on the western side of the Suez Canal,

⁶ Six-Days War is also known as *al naksah* and 1967 war. It was fought between June 5th and 10th by Israel against Egypt (the Arab United Republic at that time), Syria and Jordan. It ended with a massive defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. By the end of June 10th, Israel seized Gaza Strip (which was under Egyptian administrative rule), West Bank (which was under Jordanian administrative rule) including Jerusalem, Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights. Although Egypt retreated Sinai later by a combination of military operation in 1973 and peace negotiations, the war changed the geopolitics of the region until the current time.

⁷ The National Guard is a paramilitary troops that was formed by the Egyptian state in the 1950s, as a form of civilian defensive troops but they were not permanent. However, in the Suez Crisis and 1967 war, people were encouraged to join the National Guard to stop infiltration attempts into their cities. For further information, I refer you to Mossallam's (2012) work on *Hikāyāt Sha'b–Stories of Peoplehood Nasserism, Popular Politics and Songs in Egypt 1956-1973*.

while the Army was relocated to Sinai to stop the expected Israeli invasion from the East. The national radio was broadcasting enthusiastic speeches about the war that was waited for, since a long time, to liberate Palestine and put an end to the existence of Israel in the region, as it was rhetorically expressed at that time. Everyone was waiting for and sure about the historical victory. With the outbreak of the war and the incursion of the Israeli army into Sinai, the radio kept the same tone, talking about the victories of the Egyptian army over the Israeli one, until the moment when the Israeli attacks started to hit *Al Qantra*, on the western side of the Suez Canal.

Chaos arose in *Al Qantra*, and people started to flee the village. When the train station was destroyed people used trucks to go to Port Said, and took boats to cross *Al Manzalah* lake to reach Damietta, as it was witnessed by Abbas. In his words, “we were confused in the camp... we did not even see an enemy to fight”. They were under the fire of Israeli artilleries and aircrafts with neither officers nor clear instructions to inform them what to do. “My colleagues in the camp started to flee”, he added. He jumped with other civilians in a truck that was heading to *Al Sharqia* (one of the Nile Delta governorates), where he and other soldiers were summoned by the military police and were taken to Cairo by military trucks. “We had no idea where they were taking us. We did not realize what happened, neither understood nor believed it.” Abbas continued to describe the shock by adding that “when we arrived in Cairo, the streets were blocked by people who were protesting against Abdel-Nasser’s resignation, asking him to remain in office; that was the moment when we realized that we were defeated”. It was already June

9th, when Nasser admitted the defeat and announced his decision to step down. In the following day, he retreated, after the massive protests in Cairo.

Abbas remained the night in a military camp in Cairo before he was taken back to *Al Qantra*. He stayed there for two nights, then he was sent to Port Said for another two nights. Later he was relocated to Port Fouad where he remained for a week in a soldier's trench. After that, he was dismissed and his unit in the National Guard was dissolved and he went back to Port Said.

Despite the fact that the destruction of Port Said was less than that of Suez and Ismailia, many families left the city during the war, especially when they came under direct fire. After weeks, some of these families returned to Port Said, when the cease-fire was enacted. Aziz, who was 10 years old at that time, described this migration wave as the “small migration” (*al higrāh al suhrah*) to distinguish it from the “great migration” (*al higrāh al kubrah*) in 1969, when the state imposed its decision to relocate all of the inhabitants of Canal governorates in other cities until the end of the war. *Al higrāh al suhrah* wave was unorganized, spontaneous and lasted for a short time. It is true that some families left Port Said and didn't come back until the end of the war in 1973. However, the majority of the families returned weeks later, especially those who worked for government offices and institutions, such as Aziz's parents who were working in the telecommunication station. Aziz's family migrated to *Shirbin* city, in *Al Daqahliya* governorate, where his uncle had some work relations. Later, they returned to Port Said, mainly because of work and the beginning of the school year in September.

It was easier for families from upper classes to flee Port Said with valuable belongings which enabled them to start new lives in other cities.

Also, families with strong ties to their relatives in their hometowns and villages were able to migrate to these hometowns and stay there. To the contrary, families which had been established in Port Said over two or three generations were not able to do the same; ties with relatives in hometowns and villages were weakened with time, which made it difficult for them to find a way to escape. The familial roots were so distant to be sought out. These families just stayed in Port Said waiting for the unknown. Hajj Rizq gave an account for this period. Although his family went through a very tough time, given that they were working in different forms of trade, they were not able to leave Port Said. “We didn’t have any place to go to” he explained. Hajj Rizq was born in Port Said in 1950; his father arrived at the city, when he was a child, with the grandfather. Hajj Rizq belongs to the third generation of an immigrant family, just like all of the families in Port Said that migrated to the city after its construction.

After 1967 war, time passed slowly and heavily in the city as if it was frozen. “Life stood still. The traffic in the canal stopped. All of the activities related to ship traffic stopped, trade, tourism, ship services, etc”, Hajj Rizq emphasized. He answered my question about how they lived these days, saying that “we barely managed our lives. One day, if we did not have enough money to buy food, one of us [the family members] would go fishing to feed the family. Who had money was lending who did not have. And, life went on in this way”. Despite the deep effects of the war on Port Said, the city was not fully dead; according to Aziz, some institutions and activities continued to function, such as schools, hospitals, services, internal trade, etc. The ferry kept its daily routine, crossing the Suez Canal, and linking Port Said and Port

Fouad. On the other hand, the military occupied both peripheral and central spots in the city. There was a military camp close to *al gamil* airport in the northwest and another one in the Golf land in the southeast of the city. Also, anti-craft artilleries were located on top of some buildings in strategic spots in Port Said. And, life continued in this way for almost two years, until the moment of the great migration or *al higrāh al kubra* arrived.

With the intensification of the “war of attrition”, the state decided to evacuate the Suez Canal zone. Nearly one million people were displaced from the three governorates, Port Said, Ismailia and Suez, and relocated to different cities and villages around Egypt. The population of the three urban cities was 810,700 of the national population of 36,626,204. Port Said was inhabited by 262,270 people, while the population of Ismailia was 353,975, and the population of Suez was 193,965 (Abdel Shakur, Mehanna, & Hopkins, 2005, p. 25). For the Port-Saidians, the process of forced migration took place between April and June 1969, while for the population of Suez and Ismailia, *al tahgeer* (the forced migration) started in September 1967 (p.25-26). Most of the Port-Saidian evacuees were pushed toward Delta governorates of *Al Daqahliya* and *Damietta*, while the people of Suez were relocated to the two governorates in Upper Egypt *Sohag* and *Qena*, and the people of Ismailia were relocated to *Al Sharqia* and *Qena* (ibid). The government managed to keep most of the evacuees *al mohaggaren* away from Cairo, which was already considered overcrowded with its 4 million population (p.27). However, some of the upper and middle class families of the three cities managed to get into Cairo and Alexandria (ibid). With the Egyptian recovery of Sinai peninsula after the war in 1973, the government allowed the dwellers of the Suez Canal

Zone to return, starting from December 31st, 1974, according to the records of the local council of Port Said. As I was told by most of my interlocutors, the return continued until 1976. However, no one at the moment of the forced migration could anticipate that they would come back to their homes again in less than a decade. The state played a major role in organizing the migration, although some families relied on personal links to find shelter. In general, the Ministry of Social Affairs was responsible for administering the migration, side by side with the Arab Socialist Union, which was the country's sole political party. The migration of those who worked for government institutions, such as the Suez Canal Administration, was handled by their institutions, to ensure providing the employees equivalent jobs to what they did in Port Said. Different state bodies collaborated to sort out the processes of assembling people, conveying them to their hosting cities and villages, affording temporary shelters, handling schooling, retaining jobs for those who were working for the government, and managing the problems between the evacuees and the hosting communities.

On the migration day, the people were asked to summon in specific spots in their neighborhoods. Hajj Rizq and his family, with their neighbors, were asked to gather in an empty area near the police station of *al manakh* neighborhood, while others from *al arab* neighborhood were assembled in *Saad Zaghloul* park, which is close to *al arab* police station. Most of *Al mohaggaren* were allowed to take only their clothes and light valuable belongings with them. The social servants took them to buses and loaded up their belongings into trucks. "We had no idea where we were taken to until we arrived in *Biyala* city in *Kafr al-Sheikh* governorate" Hajj Rizq remembered.

His family was resettled in a public school, which was prepared as a shelter. “We were three families in one classroom, separated by curtains” he added. Schools, football fields, and rural guest houses *mandarah* were prepared to shelter *al mohaggaren*. Students were re-schooled in other schools, and government employees had equivalent jobs to what they did in Port Said, while self-employed persons received monthly allowances from the Ministry of Social Affairs, in proportion to the number of family members.

During *al tahgeer*, a lot of families managed to find better places to stay. Indeed, most of my interlocutors, who went through the experience of the migration, moved at least twice, during the time of *al higras al kubra*. Some families were distributed among different cities. Then, they sought reunion through moving again. The separation of family members happened mainly because of the different migration plans which were enacted by different institutions. For instance, If a paterfamilias was a self-employed person, and his son was an employee of the Suez Canal Authority, the former could be relocated to one of the Delta villages, while the latter could go to Alexandria. Those who are government employees were following the migration plan of their government institutions, while self-employed were following the migration plan of the Minister of Social Affairs. Further, because of the differences between the rural host places and the urban city of Port Said, most of the self employed individuals were not able to carry on the same work they used to do in Port Said. They had to adjust to the situation by changing their work or changing their location. Hajj Rizq worked in construction, although he used to work in trading in Port Said. He lived in *Biyala* city in *Kafr al-Sheikh* governorate with his sister and mother for several

months. Later, they moved again to Alexandria to reunite with his brother who managed to rent an apartment there. Aziz emigrated with his family to *Shirbin* city, in *Al Daqahlia* governorate. Aziz's father worked half of the month for an oil company in Alexandria, while spending the other half working in Port Said. He was one of *al-mostabqeen*, who were kept by the government in the Canal cities to run necessary services for the military, such as power and water stations, hospitals, telecommunications, etc. So, after a year of moving through three different cities, the father managed to find an apartment for the family in Damietta city, less than an hour drive from Port Said, to make it easier for him to stay in contact with his family. Gad was separated from his family during the migration in 1969. He was 23 years old at that time. He was forcibly moved to *Zefta* city in *Al Gharbia* Governorate, while his family was relocated to *Al Menoufia*. Later, he moved to *Talkha* City, in *Al Daqahlia*, rented an apartment and was reunited with his family, which moved there.

Despite the temporariness of the migration, lasting for 5 to 7 years, it had deep effects on the evacuees. The effects reshaped a lot of what was to become the city of Port Said and its dwellers. Through the whole process of the migration, the Port-Saidians were reproduced as "evacuees" *mohaggaren*; a new subjectivity was crafted through documents and practices of both state and individuals. Although this subjectivity is expected to be temporary, it lasted even after returning to Port Said. Starting from the 1970s onward, the figure of *al mohaggar* (the singular noun of *al mohaggaren*) has become part and parcel of the claims on the city, identifying who was the real Port-Saidian, and who deserved access to the city and its services. In addition, the Port-Saidian people engaged in a complex process of remaking the self by

producing the other, the host communities. A discursive process of making the city and its dwellers began during the migration period, based on the “distinctiveness” of both, Port Said and Port-Saidians. In my interviews that tackled the migration period, most of my interlocutors highlighted their perceptions toward the distinctiveness between the Port-Saidians and the others, drawing a borderline between the urban city they came from, and rural areas they emigrated to, the modern and civilized appearance of the Port-Saidians and the primitiveness of the host communities, the openness of Port Said to the world and the parochial of the rural; my interlocutors perceive all of that as part of what constitutes the “uniqueness” of Port Said. In the following sections of this chapter, I attempt to unpack these processes to emphasize how they contributed to the making of the social of Port Said.

In this chapter, I draw on Khalili’s (2007) work on the Mnemonic narratives in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Khalili focused on the mnemonic practices not as psychological or cognitive acts of remembering but as social practices which construct and are constructed by the social and political contexts that mutually shape the individual and collective memories. She argued that the mnemonic practices worked as containers for specific narratives, constituting significant facets of the refugees’ identity and different ways to understand their past. In that sense, I argue that the past is not constant, and memories were not merely shaped in the past. Recalling the past is always a process that belongs to the now-time, as it was emphasised by Benjamin (1969a). Past and present mutually constitute each other. In her work, Khalili follows the transformation in mnemonic narratives from heroic to tragic. The former emerged “when the predominant local institutions are

political factions that use the rich Third-Worldist transnational discourse of national liberation to appeal and mobilize a local audience of Palestinians and move them to militant activism” (Khalili, 2007, p.7340), while the latter were forged during the post Lebanon’s Civil War era, and when NGOs replaced political parties (ibid). Further, I relied on several studies to understand forced migrations from the Suez Canal Zone after the 1967 war (Abdel Shakur, Mehanna, & Hopkins, 2005), and the Nubian forced migration (Mossallam, 2012; Fernea & Kennedy, 1966). In the work done by Abdel Shakur, Mehanna and Hopkins (2005), they draw on personal testimonies, not to reconstruct the history but to construct “a composite picture of personal pasts” (p.24), reflecting contemporary values. In the work of Fernea and Kennedy (1966) on forced migration from Old Nuba, they focused more on the transformations of the social and economic life after the migration, and the coping mechanisms that has followed in the first year after the migration. Mossallam (2012) focused more on the altered narratives which evolved before, during and after the migration, and the justification for the different positions taken during these periods. In my work, I focused on the narratives that were formed and developed during and after *al tahgeer* and their effects on the production of the self and the city.

(2)

During *al tahgeer*, uprooting the Port-Saidians from their city and relocating them to what people called “strange environments” brought about a process of making the self through producing the other. In the moment of the forced migration from Port Said, it was unknown to anyone when they would be allowed to return. Then, the Port-Saidians started to reinvent the

hometown, through practices, beliefs, and songs. However, by using the term “reinventing” I do not suggest that this process of making the self was merely an imaginary process that took place in the emigrants’ minds. On the contrary, I argue that it was a process that relied on and was reflected in the materiality of their lives in Port Said before the war and through the hosting places during *al tahgeer*.

When I asked Aziz about his experience with the host communities during *al tahgeer*, he told me that “there was an admiration of the Port-Saidians. We used to deal with the host communities in a civic and urban manner”. Aziz was in *Shirbin*, one of the cities of *Al Daqahliyah* governorate. However, he attributed to the Port-Saidians the very basic idea of introducing “money”, in commercial transactions, to the people of *Shirbin*. “The barber was bartering two eggs for hairdressing. When we came to the city, we were paying two piasters for the hairdresser. Then the barber started to grumble from the locals”, Aziz added, while he was laughing. Although it is still hard to believe that the population of a city in the Nile Delta was still bartering until the late 1960s, it was repeated in different interviews. When I asked Hajj Rizq why he did not practice trading, instead of construction, during the migration time, he replied in a sarcastic tone, “our trading is different than theirs. They [the locals] were trading eggs”. Hajj Rizq used to work with his family members in their souvenir shop, selling imported clothes, leather goods, oriental souvenirs, etc. Their clients were mainly foreign tourists and sailors, who were crossing the Canal, and Egyptian visitors - mostly from Cairo - during the summers. “[The locals] lives were different from ours. They used to manage their lives with what they had in their hands. But, we used to live the

day, to eat three meals every day. They were eating whatever was available in their houses. We used to buy our needs. They did not know buying”, Hajj Rizq explained. Gad also emphasized the idea that the locals were not used to buy all their needs from the market. Rather, they used to produce their basic needs, such as food and cloth, at home. During his stay in *Zefta*, he managed to buy frozen fish from Damietta and Mansoura, selling it in *Zefta* to earn his living, while his father in *Al Menoufia* had no chance to trade with the locals because of their self-sufficient households. Aziz emphasized another point, that the people of *Shirbin* did not use to lease their houses. During *al higrāh al sughra*, Aziz’s family suffered to find someone who accepts to lease them an apartment. “My uncle walked the whole city to find someone who would accept to lease us a house, and he hardly did, although there were vacant apartments. The people of *Shirbin* built their houses for their families, sons, and daughters. It was shameful for them to let a stranger enter their homes”. Later, during *al higrāh al kubra* more people in *Shirbin* started to accept the idea of leasing their houses.

Proceeding with Aziz’s account, he continued portraying the “cultural superiority” of the Port-Saidians over the locals, “I was a star in the school of *Shirbin*, although I was an average student in Port Said. However, the most insignificant student from Port Said was better than the most outstanding student in *Shirbin*”. He justified his argument by clarifying that he was enrolled in a private school, while he was in Port Said, and this was the reason why he mastered English and French languages, while the students of the public schools in *Shirbin* were in their first steps to learn foreign languages. Aziz attributed a lot of the “Port-Saidians supremacy” to the effect of the foreigners

on the city and its Egyptian dwellers. “The Port-Saidian teachers were better than the locals. They improved the education in *Shirbin* schools during *al tahgeer*. The same could be said about other professions and crafts” Aziz added.

This skillfulness was attributed to the knowledge transmission from the foreigners in Port Said to the Egyptians. Also, the competition between the two parties in the local labor market in Port Said enforced a high level of skillfulness among Egyptian professionals and artisans. Before *al tahgeer*, Abbas was a carpenter in one of the workshops in Port Said which was owned by an Egyptian. Later, he joined the Suez Canal Authority after nationalizing it. He illustrated a schema of the existence of the foreigners in the labor market of Port Said by saying that, “the Italians and Greeks were skillful artisans, while the French people were working mainly in the administrative work in the Suez Canal Company”. For him, it was important for the Egyptian workers to be skillful enough to compete with the Italians and Greeks. And, proudly he said, “truly, we were skillful”. The Port-Saidian western outfit was also attributed to the foreigners’ effects on the city. Abbas remembered Port Said during his childhood in the 1940s and 1950s with a smile, “wearing a jilbab meant that you were still new to the city, a newcomer. Most of the Port-Saidians were wearing like the foreigners [the europeans]. One could be penniless but took care of his outfit”. Aziz added to this, “during *al tahgeer*, the Port-Saidian was recognized by how he looked”, referring to the western outfit of the Port-Saidian comparable to the local outfit of the members of the host communities, who were wearing the jilbab.

In the previous accounts, it can be noticed that the interlocutors were remembering themselves as actors, who affected the host communities. They attributed to themselves many changes in the local culture and consumption practices of the host communities. This emphasis on the ability of the Port-Saidians to affect others attempted to invert the image of the passive dependent displaced person. Most of the interlocutors were using plural nouns, while talking about their experience during *al tahgeer*. They talked about the experience of the “Port-Saidians”: how the Port-Saidians were recognized, how they affected the host communities, etc. Drawing on Latour (2005), this plurality intends to create a collective sense of the Port-Saidians; it is a group-formation act upon the other groups, the host communities. Linking this to Khalili’s (2007) work on the Mnemonic narratives, this is how the collective identity of the Port-Saidians - as urbanized, developed and open to the world - was re-invented during *al tahgeer*, through sharing these stories about themselves as a group. Also, *Simsimyah* gatherings played a major role in forging the collective identity of the Port-Saidians. During *al tahgeer*, they sang to Port Said, raising hope that one day *al mohaggaren* would return to their city. These gatherings worked as ritualistic practices, through which collective identity and group formation was formed⁸.

The feeling of alienation pushed the Port-Saidians not to be absorbed in the host communities. Aziz emphasized that the Port-Saidian community during *al tahgeer* was interconnected. There was a sense of understanding and empathy among them, based on sharing the same culture. “The Port-Saidian was looking for a fellow to live close to him” he added. In Damietta,

⁸ More about *Simsimyah* will be discussed in chapter three.

Aziz and his family lived in *ard al a'sar* area. "80% of the buildings in this place were inhabited by Port-Saidians. Landlords built new apartments for us, especially that most of the Port-Saidians in this area were from the middle class who can afford to pay their rents" he said. A lot of marriages between Port-Saidian families were arranged during *al tahgeer* because of this communal sense. It was common that the Port-Saidians preferred to intermarry instead of marrying from the host communities to avoid clashes which could be triggered by cultural differences and to secure the possibility of returning to the city after the ending of the war. "People were afraid that a husband or a wife from the host community would refuse to go to Port Said after the end of the war", Aziz explained. Further, another interlocutor, Bahgat, told me that his father was very keen to register his children, who were born during *al tahgeer*, as Port-Saidians, rather than according to where they were born. In spite of this, however, Bahgat's family did not return to Port Said until 1976, and the father was repeatedly visiting the city, accompanying his son, who was 10 years old at this time. For Bahgat, his first memories of the city were forged in these visits. He still remembers how the city was destroyed after the war. The scene of the horizon which was full of shacks of returnees who lost their houses in the war still haunts his mind.

Al tahgeer generally developed more attachment toward Port Said. For instance, Gad did not stop visiting Port Said during *al tahgeer*, although it was risky with the intensification of the war of attrition. He managed to issue permits from the Military Intelligence to visit the city, which was turned into a military zone. He would stay there for a couple of weeks and then get back to Delta. When I asked him what was he doing in Port Said during his visits, he

replied, “I was visiting my family house in *al arab* neighborhood, making sure that it is still intact. During the weeks of my stay in Port Said, I used to work for a fish restaurant close to my house”. Gad still lives in the same house. Now, he owns and runs a small fish restaurant with his son. During these visits, he witnessed a lot of destruction. The scenes are still vivid in his mind. He told me that in one of the raids a man was running down the street, trying to seek a shelter. A bomb fell close to him. The explosion did not kill the man directly but a fragment from the bomb beheaded him. The man’s body kept moving for several steps before falling down on the ground. After each raid, Gad was participating with others in collecting the dead bodies from the ruined buildings to bury them together in the martyrs’ tomb, in the city’s cemetery, without headstones or religious rituals. Despite these terrifying scenes, Gad kept visiting the city during the war, not only to check his family’s belongings, but also to ensure something more. Gad’s visits to the city during the war were more like an attempt to reconnect with the life he used to have in Port Said before *al tahgeer*. It was an attempt to revisit this life, even if it did not look the same. Yet, staying at the same house and doing the same work produced a sense of familiarity, ensuring that his existence, as he used to identify with it, did not vanish. What Gad visited was the rubble of his past life. The war and *al tahgeer* transformed this life into rubble, yet he was able to recognize the traces of his destroyed life in the debris of the city, but not in *Zefta*. Or, as it was described by de Certeau (1984, p.108) “there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can “invoke” or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in”.

People used to identify their existence through various practices and modes of existence, such as dwelling, working, lifestyle, etc. Space, which enables these practices and is also constructed by these practices, becomes part of this existence. For the Port-Saidians, *al tahgeer* represented a threat to the practices and modes of existence they used to identify with. During *al tahgeer*, the Port-Saidians lost what materially defines their existence, the city. As a reaction, they were immersed in an extensive effort to reinvent this home city. This reinvention process took the shape of reproducing the self through portraying the other (the host communities) as rural, primitive, and parochial, although *Zefta*, *Biyala* and *Shirbin* - which were mentioned in different accounts as hosting cities - were not villages but cities. Yet, for my interlocutors, all of these cities were not as developed as Port Said. The reliance on sufficient households or wearing non-western clothes were perceived as signs of primitiveness, although they are not by nature. However, they were produced as such. The binary was emphasized to remake the self through othering the other. In and through this distinction, my interlocutors were able to identify themselves again, protecting the existence that was threatened by *al tahgeer*. *Zefta*, *Biyala* and *Shirbin* had to be produced as primitive places to reproduce Port-Said as an urban and civilized hometown.

Similar process of reinventing the homeland as “blessed” took place also in the case of the Nubian migrants. Fernea and Kennedy (1966, p.349) stated that most of the Nubians “considered the climate, land, and water superior to that found anywhere else in the Nile valley, and they believed their villages, which were relatively free of outside interference, to have the highest

standards of peacefulness, cleanliness, honesty, and personal security in Egypt”, although they were aware of the social and economic disadvantages of their old and isolated villages. Mossallam (2012) explains more this ambivalence by highlighting the forms of estrangements Nubians experienced in the new villages they relocated to, being away from the Nile, the differences between the traditional Nubian houses and the new ones, the poor quality of the agricultural land in the new villages, and the lack of security that comes with living among Upper Egyptians and “Fallahin”, as they stated. For them, the new villages remained *bilad al tahgeer* (the migration land), as if migration “is something that is still happening; thus the process never ended, and on the contrary is being kept alive” (p.183).

Although *al mohagareen* remained inside Egypt and were not pushed outside their country, they felt strangers in the hosting cities and villages. It is true that most of my interlocutors acknowledged that they were mostly treated well by host communities. However, the cultural differences, and the threat to their existence as they used to recognize enlarged their feeling of vulnerability. It is astonishing how this sense of vulnerability was mixed with claims of cultural supremacy. The relationship between both is not one of coexistence. Rather, it is co-constitutive. The ordinary life before the war was absorbed during *al tahgeer* to produce these claims of cultural supremacy, as Das (2007) was relating between the eventual and the ordinary. But the question is how the eventual was absorbed in the ordinary, what remained from *al tahgeer* and how this was reflected in the aftermath.

(3)

One day in October 2016, I visited the office of the social solidarity directory in Port Said, seeking any records about the migration *al tahgeer* in the city, such as the number of displaced inhabitants, statistics about the distribution plan of the evacuees *al mohaggaren*, etc. I was told by Aziz that I might find this kind of records there. The Ministry of Social Affairs (currently the Ministry of Social Solidarity) was one of the government bodies responsible for managing *al tahgeer* from Port Said, as I was informed by different interlocutors. Aziz, who occupied a senior position in the governorate administration of Port Said, managed to guide me through the bureaucratic maze. He accompanied me to the social solidarity branch office, introduced me to a female employee who is responsible for the information center in the office. I explained what I was doing and what I needed. However, she replied that they had nothing of what I was asking for. "We don't have any records or statistics related to *al tahgeer*. We merely have the migration cards" she replied. I asked her what she meant by the migration cards, and she replied: "These cards were produced during *al tahgeer*, where the information of every *mohaggar* is recorded".

Although I was disappointed by what I was just told, I asked the employee to let me see the cards. I expected to move to an abandoned room, covered with dust and full of files that had no use except perhaps as a good meal for rats. Contrary to my imagination, I just stepped outside the office, where I met the employee and moved two steps toward another room on the same floor. The room did not seem abandoned at all; it was inhabited by four employees, two men and two women, sitting by two desks, and they were

about to have their breakfast. The opposite wall was half covered by bluish-gray drawers which contained the migration cards in alphabetical order. One of the female employees started to explain, "in this room, we have only the cards of *al mohaggaren* who were self-employed. The Ministry of Social Affairs was responsible for managing the migration of this group, while those who worked for government institutions were the responsibility of their institutions and offices". Then, the employee mentioned, "we keep the cards for the moment when people ask for them". And that was a surprise; why does anyone still need to ask for these cards?

During *al tahgeer*, migration documents were produced by the government and delivered to *al mohaggaren*. These documents were used to facilitate receiving monthly allowances, re-schooling students, opening businesses, exempting from public transport fees, etc. In general, they were used to govern *al mohaggaren* and to administrate the relocation process. Although the migration document did not solely create the status of *al mohaggar*, it transformed the evacuee into a legal subject. The emigrant's state of migration became a legal matter, which could be proven or contested. However, I did not expect to find all of these dynamics evident until that moment. I asked the employee "why does anyone still need to ask for these cards?" and she answered,

When anyone wants to get one of the apartments of social housing projects, the person needs to present a proof that he or she is from Port Said. Then, the person comes to us and we search for the card of their fathers or grandfathers [the person who was part of the migration

plan]. Then, we issue a certificate documenting that the ancestor of this person was part of the migration plan of the government.

According to what I was told by the employee, the migration cards were used as a proof of indigeneity, which supports the claims to the city. I asked the employee why it is needed to rely on migration cards instead of national IDs or birth certificates to ensure the “Port-Saidian legal identity” of the person, and the answer was that these new documents identify the current status of the person but not the status of “the origin”. A person might be born in Port Said but the parents could be from other cities, or the person might live in Port Said but he or she is a newcomer to the city. So they managed to consult the migration cards. For those who were working for government institutions, they - as well as their descendants - can have the same certificates from the institutions they worked for. Those who migrated on their own can request a certificate of their family record to prove that they are from Port Said⁹.

All of these documents deal with the moment of *al tahgeer* as a reference point, that rules out who is the Port-Saidian and who is not, and by extension who has the right to the city and its services and who does not. Indeed, at the moment of producing these cards, they were not intended to be used in that manner. However, later they have become one of the foundations that define who is the real Port-Saidian, and to distinguish between locals and newcomers, especially during the reconstruction of the city after 1974. The

⁹ It should be mentioned here that additional regulations were added to facilitate the process of having access to the city services. In the current times, it is not solely the migration documents that prove the indigenusness of a person. In addition, one can support his or her claim by providing a proof of ten years of continuous work or residency in the city to apply for a social housing apartment, issue a tax-free car licence, or acquire an “import permit” to work in the free trade zone.

moment of the migration was the perfect moment to be used as a reference point to define the “Port-Saidiness” as a legal identity. The state managed to evict all of the inhabitants of the city, except those who had to remain *almostabqeen*, who were also documented and carried special documents. During this process, family members were counted and their names, ages and jobs were recorded in the migration cards and the migration documents (the latter were kept with the families). The documents, initially produced as a governing tool during migration, were reused later as a proof of being Port-Saidian. The migration documents, in that sense, became actors according to the Latourian framework. They are actors as long as they are able “to modify a state of affairs by making a difference” (Latour, 2005, p.71). Indeed, they played a major role in defining who has the right to the city and who is not, who is the real Port-Saidian and how is not. The migration documents played a role as an actor in forming the Port-Saidinas as a group. It can be said that, as the migration document produced the legal status of the migrant, it affirmed the legal status of the Port-Saidian after the return to the city. In other words, the legality of the migrant was transmitted to the returnee and was used to produce the Port-Saidians as legal subjects. And, as any claims of legal status, it can be proven or contested.

The proof of Port-Saidiness is always a matter of contestation in Port Said. It is almost impossible to have a conversation with a Port-Saidian without mentioning the strangers *al a'ghrab* and their negative effects on the city, which is so astonishing in a city that was constituted in the first place by strangers from all over Egypt. The questions of when this Port-Saidiness identity is gained, and why it is so important to be emphasized are so difficult

to be fully answered. I am not suggesting that the Port-Saidian identity was created by the migration documents. Rather, I argue that the migration document, as any state document, created the legality of the evacuee, returnee and Port-Saidian, producing a sort of legitimacy for their claims on the city. On the other hand, the document deprived others from this legitimacy: the strangers *al a'ghrab*.

To understand the context of the production of the legality of the Port-Saidian and the illegitimacy of the stranger, I will quote Aziz here, who gives an account to the moment of the return to the city after 1974.

The moment of return was the hardest. The people from middle class started to return to the city immediately after the war. A lot of buildings were totally destroyed or needed repair. Most of the destruction happened during 1973 war¹⁰, and not like Suez and Ismailia, which were destroyed during 1967 war. At the end, the level of destruction that happened in Port Said during 1973 war was similar to what happened to the other canal cities. There were a lot of victims among al-mostabqeen. When the people started to return, they did not know if their houses were still there or not, especially those who had no mostabqeen among their relatives to tell them about their houses. People were carrying their belongings and going to the city. Some of them arrived at Port Said to find that their houses were destroyed; they stood before their ruined houses with no idea about what to do. Most

¹⁰ Many of my interlocutors attributed the less destruction of Port Said to the fact that it was protected by the existence of Port Fouad on the other side of the Canal. Port Fouad was the only spot in Sinai peninsula that was not occupied by Israel (Hassan, 2016). However, with the intensification of the war of attrition, Port Said was targeted by more raids and by the end of 1973 war the destruction of the city was almost similar to Suez and Ismailia.

people lost their savings during al tahgeer. Others lost their houses because they simply stopped paying the rent when they were away from the city. During al tahgeer, people did not know when they would be able to return to their lives, or even if that would happen at any moment soon. The image of the Palestinian refugees was vividly present in their minds¹¹. Others lost their houses because the landlord wanted to issue new contracts with higher rents. Generally, there was a massive social mobilization toward the bottom. The service sector in the city was paralyzed. The merchants had no capital to start with; the buyers had no money to buy. It was an economic vacuum. Some people had to live in shacks, waiting for resettlement by the government. The state started to prepare temporary shelters in schools for those who lost their houses. The shelters were not only for poor people but also for middle-class families who lost their houses; among them, there were others who came to the city and claimed to be Port-Saidians [to take advantage of the restatement].

¹¹ In the same interview, Aziz suggested that the government intended to use the word *mohaggaren* (migrants) instead of refugees to avoid any referral to the Palestinian case. Also, one interpretation of the government's decision to distribute migrants around Egypt instead of building refugee camps was to escape the parallel to the Palestinian case. However, I think this decision was made to benefit the capacity of the major cities to absorb the stream of migrants. In general, it can be said that the government and the people had the Palestinian parallel in mind, and tried to avoid it. However, the two cases were different. In the Palestinian case, people fled the West Bank in 1948 as a result of the "fear of physical harm and the psychological pressure of dealing with the occupying army especially with regard to the honor of women and the senior men" (Abdel Shakur, Mehanna, & Hopkins, 2005, p. 23). In Egypt, people fled the Canal cities as a result of the fear of physical harm, yet they were not under direct occupation of the Israeli army to be concerned with honor of women (ibid). The similarity can be seen in the fact that the Palestinians, in 1948, did not flee directly to a final destination. Rather, they moved several times, and they even tried to get back to their villages whenever they found a way to them (ibid). The same pattern can be noticed among Port-Saidians and generally the Suez Canal migrants. Both did not know what to expect, yet they were thinking that the migration would last only for months.

Aziz's account raised my curiosity towards the category of "the strangers" or *al a'ghrab* who were mostly rendered as "opportunity seekers" when they were mentioned in my interviews. I suggest that this narrative of *al a'ghrab* was intensified with the moment of the return to the city and lasted for long time, as it will be discussed in the following lines. "The New Port Said" was a monthly local magazine, which began to be published in the early 1980s. In the issue of April 1983, an opinion article was published by Qasem Abdo, urged the local administration to take action against *al-a'ghrab* who got apartments from the government, leaving the Port-Saidians to suffer from the housing crisis. The writer emphasized that there were more than 1500 Port-Saidian family that were unable to return to the city because of the lack of proper houses. Later in the issue of April 1989, a piece of news highlighted that the police director ordered to demolish the shacks in the suburbs of Port Said, which were inhabited by people who had no work documents or registered children in the city schools. The order also included a declaration of a plane to survey all of the shacks in the city, to inspect any "fake claims" to the right to rehousing, and exclude those from the governmental housing plans. Finally, the order announced a reward of EGP 10 for anyone who would report a newly built shack.

The previous accounts highlight the crisis of dwelling in Port Said during the reconstruction epoch, even after a decade from the return. The housing crisis encompassed the process of producing the legal identity of the Port-Saidians and the illegitimacy of the stranger *ghareb*. Earlier accounts could more clearly illustrate the image of the destroyed city that needed a lot

of effort to be habitable again. Through reading the records of the local council of Port Said, it was obvious that the administration was in rush to meet the needs of the returnees. For instance, on 12 December 1975, the local council urged the administration to finish the preparation of the temporary shelter in the “socialist youth institution” as soon as possible. Also, the local council permitted the landlords to add more floors to their existing buildings in the reconstruction areas after consulting the official technical offices in the neighborhoods. On 17th March 1976, the council assigned two pieces of land for two different housing cooperatives and approved a governmental loan to a third one to finance the construction costs. Further, the council asked the electricity and drinking water directories of the city to inform the residents of the power and water cuts schedule, until putting an end to the frequent cuts “phenomenon” soon. Later, in April of the same year, the council asked the parliamentary representatives of Port Said to raise the issue of the repetitive power cuts in the People’s Assembly. In the same meeting, the council urged the administration to ask the Ministry of Housing to support the housing budget of Port Said with an additional one million EGP to meet the city’s needs.

Together these pieces emphasize the pressure of the returnees who did not wait until the reconstruction of the city; the desire to return to the home city after the tough years of *al tahgeer* pushed *al mohaggaren* not to wait; the transitional period of *al tahgeer* had to come to an end. The conditions of the city enlarged the sensitivity of the Port-Saidians toward *al-ag’rab* who were rendered mostly as opportunity seekers, according to the Port-Saidians’ accounts. This sensitivity intensified when the city recovery time was

prolonged. The crisis of dwelling took longer to be solved. Different accounts of various interlocutors made it clear that *al manakh* neighborhood was full of shacks of *al mohaggaren* who lost their houses. Various factors contributed to the extension of recovery time. In addition to the overall recessive economic situation in Egypt starting from the 1970s, Port Said witnessed a permanent crisis in land management. The city is a semi-island, surrounded by water on three sides, the Mediterranean in the north, the Suez Canal on the east, and *Al Manzalah* Lake on the west. This unique geographical configuration made it so difficult to expand the land of the city, which consequently led to a continuous increase in the prices of land and real estate. As it was stated by Hajj Rizq, “the land is so precious in Port Said”. According to the indicator of deprivation in the built environment, which was launched in 2016 by a group of urbanist scholars, Port Said has the least affordable houses in relation to the average income of the city residents. Furthermore, with the declaration of the free trade zone in Port Said, more pressure was added to the land of the city, more “strangers” arrived, more houses needed to be built, and more infrastructure needed to be expanded.

The later accounts could explain why the migration documents still play this role in identifying who is Port-Saidian and who is not, even after decades from *al tahgeer*. The employees in the office of the social solidarity directory did not forget to complain from the amount of work they had to do during the last months, issuing certificates for all of the young men and women who wanted to apply for the new social housing apartments. It is still astonishing how the migration documents shifted from being related to a specific time to gain a sense of permanency, as if migration did not end. *Al tahgeer* here

represents how the eventful could descent into the ordinary, the everyday, and how the affect of this critical event could last and haunt the present. Each time the social solidarity employee grasps one of these cards the event of the migration resurfaces again. With the new use of these cards, the subjectivity of the emigrant is reproduced in the contemporary, fusing the migration and the after-return phases together, weaving the subjectivity of *al mohaggar* with the that of the “real Port-Saidian”.

It is true that the crises of the dwelling after the return magnified the sensitivity toward *al-a'ghrab*, giving more weight to the claims of authenticity. However, the notion itself has roots in the pre-war epoch and during *al tahgeer*. For instance, Aziz acknowledged that “the ‘chauvinist pride’ of the Port-Saidian identity has existed before *al-tahgeer*, and not after it as most of the people think”. He noticed this pride in various situations when he was young. “Families preferred a groom from a Port-Saidian family than a stranger who just spent few years in the city, although we are all strangers here” he explained. A groom from an established Port-Saidian family was more trusted for marriage. Also, in any elections, “there was a priority for the candidate who had extended roots in the city than the one who was a fresh newcomer”, he added. Aziz laughed while remembering the internal elections to choose the head of a community association of the immigrants from one of the Upper Egypt villages, “they preferred a candidate who spent more years in Port Said to another one who was a newcomer or just spent fewer years in the city, although the newcomer had fresh relations to their roots in Upper Egypt”. He explained that more years in Port Said means more relations with different circles, and a better ability to facilitate services. Aziz added another layer to

the meaning of being stranger *ghareb* (the singular noun of *a'ghrab*) by saying, "if someone wanted to insult another, he said 'you are a peasant'. Then, the other had to reply by saying that I am more Port-Saidian than you". Being a peasant or *ghareb* suggests a sort of cultural and social inferiority. Using the Latourian framework, *al ghareb* has to be created to facilitate the formation of the Port-Saidians as a group, drawing a new borderline to define the self, acting upon other group (*al a'ghrab*).

This is why it is not common to describe the foreigners in the city as *a'ghrab*. I never heard any of my interlocutors describing the foreigners, who used to live in Port Said until the 1950s, as *a'ghrab*. Rather, they are foreigners who used to occupy a superior position in the city, or as it was stated by Abbas, "the Frenchman was walking as if there is a plume on his nose". The foreigners did not occupy the same position of *al a'ghrab*. Although the ambivalent feeling towards them, they did not seem strangers to the city as *al a'ghrab*. They could be hated or beloved, they even could be described as colonizers but they are not *a'ghrab*. In the previously mentioned accounts, a lot of what constituted the distinctiveness of Port Said and its people was accredited to the foreigners in the city, the western outfit, the skillfulness of the workers, the openness to the world, etc. Contrasting with *al a'ghrab*, the foreigners were always rendered as part of what constituted Port Said, as it was shown in my interviews. Indeed it is a selective, yet unintentional, process.

Various accounts attributed to *al a'ghrab* a lot of "misbehaviors" after the return to the city, especially after the declaration of free trade zone. For instance, in the issue of April 1983 of "The New Port Said" magazine, a piece

of news talked about an anonymous businessman who kept on breaching the law by bribing officials to facilitate his illegal work, especially smuggling. The magazine did not forget to highlight that the businessman is also a stranger by adding, “those strangers are the responsible for the problems of the free trade zone. They should be decisively acted upon to stop their continual attempts to use bribes”. As it will be tackled in the next chapter, a lot of the undesirable side effects of the free trade zone, such as smuggling, were allegedly attributed to *al a’ghrab* who came to the city after 1973 war. The city’s changes were blamed on *al a’ghrab*, as it was stated by Abbas,

Port Said in the old days was closed on its people. The houses were composed of a maximum of 4 floors, and that was enough. Now, the houses are 20 floors. Yet, they are not enough for everyone [...] The free trade zone brought ¾ of the Egyptians to Port Said. The people did not find jobs in their places, so they came here to work on anything. Now, Port Said is crowded with people who did not go through the wars we witnessed.

The same act of othering can be found also in the way the Nubian migrants encountered with Upper Egyptians. As it was stated by Mossallam (2012), there was a common saying among Nubians reflected their feelings toward their new neighbors, *yakhudha temsah wala nigawizha fallah* (she would sooner be taken by an crocodile than we marry her to a *fallah*). Of course there are different contexts which shaped the relationships among Nubians, and Upper Egyptians and *Fallahin* on one hand, and Port-Saidians and *al a’ghrab* on the other. However, the reasons remain mostly related to cultural differences and economic unease.

During *al tahgeer*, the dream of the return to the city captured the imagination of the people. After the return, Port Said was not the same. After the declaration of the free trade zone, Port Said “deviated” more and more from what it used to be. People who lived through *al tahgeer* were haunted more and more by the fantasy of “ the return”. It turned out to be like an unfulfilled desire that takes different ways to be expressed, as it was shown partly in this chapter and will be shown in more detail later. In what was previously mentioned, *al tahgeer* was more than an action of displacement or an epoch of being distant from the hometown. It was rather more like a process of transforming the self, the other, the space and the relation among all of them. It was more of a process that cannot be unpacked without weaving all of these fragments together: Gad’s visits to Port Said while it was under fire, Bahgat’s father insistence to register his newly born children as Port-Saidians, the tendency of *al mohaggaren* to stick together in clusters in the hosting places, and the documentation process that produced the legality of the Port-Saidians.

Chapter 2:

Shifting Modalities: From Sea Trading to Land Trading

One night, after finishing an interview in *al arab* neighborhood, I walked in Saad Zaghloul Street, which cuts across two districts, *al arab* and *al i'frang*. It is one of the most commercial streets in Port Said, especially the part in *al arab*, which is full of clothes shops and home appliances stores. The weather was nice. Families were hanging out, looking in shops' windows. At the corner of one of the side streets, I found a small kiosk with a sign saying, "Mosques are the best places on earth, while markets are the most evil." The sign made me laugh loudly, especially that it was hanging on a kiosk in the middle of the most commercial spot in Port Said. However, it resonates with what was repeatedly said in various interviews, especially by those who are "anti-trading," or let's say against the trading modality of the free trade zone (FTZ). People like Bahgat, who is a *Simimyah* maker, and Abbas, who is an artisan and a *Simimyah* poet, do not like the version of Port Said after FTZ. They think the dynamics that followed the declaration of the FTZ changed the city for the worse, made its people used to turning a quick profit, and altered the culture of the Port-Saidians. There is always an ambivalent narrative toward FTZ, even among people who work in trading. It was common among my interlocutors to express contradictory positions toward the FTZ. "It helped the people to recover from the consequences of *al tahgeer*. However, it made the Port-Saidians accustomed to quick profits. It was a gift from President Sadat to the people of Port Said, who suffered a lot. However, *al a'ghrab* profited from it, and not the locals". Other contradictory statements about the FTZ

were repeatedly mentioned in almost every interview that tackled the effect of the FTZ. The Kiosk sign was not an exception.

Port Said is, as its name suggests, a port city. It relied on various activities related to the sea and to international marine traffic, among them trading. However, during my fieldwork, people were always pointing to the differences between the two modalities of trading, before and after FTZ. The latter had a major transformative capacity on the city and its people, although it started by a very simple act: the issuing of a presidential decree and the establishment of customs offices at the entrances of the city. However, this simple act triggered a complex chain of reactions that drastically changed Port Said. Shifting from sea trading — *tigarat al bahr* — to land trading — *tigarat al bar* — can serve as an overarching label to describe these changes. Each modality of trading reproduced space and reassembled the social in a different manner, producing different subjects, documents, and systems of governance, adding more layers to the city that is always in the making. In this chapter, I follow the traces of these changes, unpacking its effects on the people of Port Said and the groups that were formed by the trading activities.

(1)

"Like a boat in the water," is how the captain described Port Said, emphasizing two facts: the city's attachment to the sea, and the geographical nature of Port Said as a semi-island. The first time I saw the captain — or *al qobtan*, as most of the people used to call him — was in one of the weekly nights of the *al tanbourah Simsimyah* band. When the band started to sing *al*

bamboutyah song, he stood and started to perform the folkloric dance of the *Simsimyah*, using his hands to imitate *al bamboutyah* moves, throwing an imaginary rope to an imaginary sailor on an imaginary ship. The rope supposedly carried a pack of something, such as a box of cigarettes, to the imaginary sailor. Then, the latter took the box and tied money to the rope. *Al qobtan* imitated the rope pulling move to take the imaginary money. Later, he started another move, mimicking a boatman paddling with a small boat, while he was moving his legs as if he was walking in the same place. Although he was 72 years old, he was dancing enthusiastically in his dark sunglasses and black navy cap. He was very famous for those who used to attend *al tanbourah* concerts every Thursday night in the *al nigmah* casino in Port Fouad. He was called *al qobtan*, referring to his job as a boatman in one of the companies of the Suez Canal Authority. His task was to reach ships with technical problems in the middle of the Canal, allowing a team of technicians to help them. Secretly, he was also a *bambouty* (the singular noun of *bamboutyah*), which means he was selling commodities to sailors or exchanging goods with them, on ships, while they were crossing the canal or docked at the harbor. Working as a *bambouty* was not illegal, however, he was not allowed to do so, according to the regulations that were enforced by the Suez Canal Authority on its employees.

Al bamboutyah is one of the most traditional professions, and it is related to sea trading in Port Said as well as the other cities on the canal. It emerged during the early years of Port Said. The name is believed to be derived from the English word boatman, as I was told by different interlocutors. It is used to

describe sea traders who get on ships while crossing the canal or docking in the port to sell goods to sailors, using small boats to reach the ships in the middle of the water, and using rope ladders to get aboard. The goods that were sold ranged from oriental gifts and souvenirs from *Khan al Khalily* in Cairo, clothes, hand watches, and leather goods, to larger items such as home appliances, which needed bigger boats to be conveyed and a couple of men to help the *bambouty* to lift them. Working as a *bambouty* needs more than being an ordinary trader on land. It requires knowing other languages to communicate with sailors from everywhere on Earth, good bargaining skills, a sharp mind to know what kind of goods suit which ship, and good connections with the port officers and the Suez Canal employees in order to know the marine traffic schedule. From the maritime traffic office, *al bambouty* can learn how many ships will arrive on a certain day and when they are to arrive. Then, from the shipping agency office, he can know how many crewmembers will be on each ship, their nationalities, their destinations, and how long they had been at sea. Based on this information, he can estimate the type and quantity of merchandise he can offer to these ships, and the number of assistants he needs. This network of relationships is part of the human infrastructure through which the city operates, as was laid out by Simone (2004). Through these networks, massive amounts of information is exchanged and circulated everyday. Based on this information, quick assessments and decisions are made by *al bamboutyah*, engaging other networks of assistants, suppliers and boat owners (from whom *al bamboutyah* rent the boats they need to convey their merchandise). These networks and ways of operating have been developed over decades of practicing this profession, becoming more

complicated with time, and engaging in assembling *al bamboutyah* as a group in the city.

Working as a *bambouty* was a source of money and connections with people, as I was told by Hashim, who practiced the profession for decades. *Al qobtan* recounted, “During my childhood, when I found chicken leftovers before one of the houses, I assumed that there was a *bambouty* inhabiting this house”, referring to the fact that only a *bambouty* could afford a chicken meal. Yet, money was not the mere source of value of this job; relations with foreigners was another reason for a lot of people to admire it. While I was sitting with *al qobtan*, he pointed to his Navy cap and told me that he took it as a gift from an American Navy sailor while his frigate was crossing the Canal. Further, he took from his pocket a red napkin, telling me that he bought it from an American sailor, with the words “Made in the USA” written on it. Despite the fact that the napkin was actually made in China, for *al qobtan*, these tiny belongings kept him connected to this adventurous world, to an imaginary worldwide brotherhood of sailors who at one point crossed the canal. He continued to speak proudly about different gifts and goods he managed to get from sailors, such as Swiss knives, jackets, suits, watches, etc. He sold some of these things, and kept others for himself as evidence to be shown to someone like me, as a proof of being connected to this world. Hashim, who is 59 years old, also told me about his father who spoke English, Dutch, and Greek, which increased his ability as a *bambouty* to communicate with more sailors from different nationalities. He did not learn these languages in school; rather, he gained them through practicing his job, like most *al bamboutyah*

did. During my interviews, Hashim and *al qobtan* kept using English words in the middle of their sentences, to assert their knowledge of foreign languages. The social capital of *al bamboutyah* was premised on the relationships with the port officers, the Suez Canal employees, and the foreign sailors and captains they know. They lived on this social capital morally and literally. They could not practice their job without the various relationships that facilitated their work. The gifts they received from the foreign sailors were a reward that added to the value of this social capital.

Hashim inherited his job as a *bambouty* from his father, who inherited it from the grandfather. *Al qobtan* inherited his relation to the sea business from his family. His father owned a small boat, which he leased to *bamboutyah* or shipping agencies. The rest of his family members were working in the harbor. "All of my family members were working in the sea, what is expected from me to do on land!" he said. Although *al qobtan* perceived himself as an heir to his family's work, Hashim was literally a legal heir to his father's *bambouty* license, which carried the number of 334. Each *bambouty* has to have a license to practice his work and a permit to have an access to the port and the ships. Hashim showed me his license which was issued by the Ministry of Transportation, and two permits: one to access the port and the other to get aboard the ships. It is written on the license that it is valid only for three years, then it has to be renewed. The two permits to access the port and get aboard the ships have to be renewed every year, according to Hashim. This technique allowed the state to control who is allowed to enter the harbor and who is not, through periodic reviews of the criminal records of each *bambouty*.

A boatman may lose his license if he is convicted of a crime, or misbehaved on one of the ships. The licenses are allowed to be inherited by a *bambouty*'s family members. So Hashim inherited his father's license, his first brother inherited the grandfather's license, the second inherited the grandfather brother's license, and the third gained a new license as a recognition of his courage in the 1973 war. Starting from the mid-1970's, the state stopped issuing new licenses, which resulted in a decline of the number of *bamboutyah* from 600 to 396, according to Hashim, who was also the head of the Sea Traders Association until 2012. The association was established in mid-1950s "to organize the work, and to maintain the custom of their profession," as Hashim explained. Further, there are other associations for *bamboutyah*, such as the Trade Union for Sea Traders and Sea Trading Association. "One of the rules is to ensure that, when a *bambouty* gets aboard a ship, he knows the language of its sailors. This is why I work on Russian ships, while my father worked on Dutch ships," he added. This rule is imposed not only to ensure efficiency but also to avoid conflicts among *al bamboutyah*.

Beside *al bamboutyah*, there were other sects (*tawai'f*) which worked in ship services, such as the ship waste sect that bought scrap from ships and sold them to scrap merchants. Also, there was the artisans' sect, which includes hairdressers, ironers, smiths, and carpenters who boarded ships to provide services. All of these individuals needed licenses to practice their jobs and permits to enter the harbor and get aboard ships. They had other organizations, similar to the Sea Traders Association, to represent and organize them. There were other extinct sects, such as coal heavers, which

disappeared with time and as shipping technology developed. The daily lives of these *tawa'if* were connected to the marine traffic, but they were not alone in this. "The whole city was ready for foreign visitors," as Hajj Rizq described Port Said in the past, adding, "The city was relying on tourism and trading activities related to the canal". The golden decades of sea trading in Port Said lasted until the 1960s. During this time, the city was full of souvenir shops, restaurants, casinos, bars, and hotels to serve foreign sailors and tourists while crossing the Canal, as well as foreign residents in the city. Hajj Rizq's family was part of this life. They owned several shops in Port Said, where he started to work when he was young. He was born in 1950, and started to work while he was in primary school. He did not proceed with his education after middle school. Rather, he preferred to work with his family. For Hajj Rizq, trading was more attractive than being hired by the government or even working for the Suez Canal Authority. "What I was earning from trading in a month was double the salary of an employee in the Canal Authority," Hajj Rizq explained. At that time, ships were required to wait in Port Said's harbor until they were allowed to traverse the canal in a convoy. "The ships were lining up, starting from the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps [at the beginning of the wharf] to the Customs Department gate," Hajj Rizq recalled. During the waiting time, sailors and tourists were permitted to enter the city, companies supplied ships with their needs, and *al bamboutyah* exchanged their commodities. Before the eventual spread of phone lines in Port Said, one person's job was to wake people up who worked in ship services, notifying them that a ship had arrived and telling them in which part of the harbor it was docked. His job title was *al mosahyaty* (the man who wakes people up). He

moved by bicycle, with a list of names and addresses of people he needed to wake up for work. The city sprang to life whenever ships arrived, as Abbas described: "When we had ships in the port, *al i'frang* neighborhood would stay lit up until the morning".

The previous accounts describe a life that was centered around the sea. And by the sea, or *al malih* (the salty), I mean both the Mediterranean and the canal, as most of my interlocutors merged them into one entity. *Al malih* was the source of wealth. Further, it was the base of the existence of Port Said's people. The city was purpose-built as a port, located in this spot to be the terminal of the canal. In that sense, the canal was more than an object, it was an agent that contributed to the assembling of the social and the production of the space of the city. All of these sects (*tawai'f*) were social groups that assembled around the canal and its activities. The rhythm of the traffic in the canal adjusted the rhythm of the life in Port Said, as if the canal were a maestro conducting its orchestra. Before going to Port Said, I had thought of the city as a space with two major poles of activities: the Free Trade Zone and the Suez Canal Authority, but I was wrong about the Canal Authority. The canal is bigger than the institution. The various modalities of lives connected to the canal are more complex and too broad to be confined within the boundaries of the Canal Authority. The canal was perceived as something that belongs to the people of the city and not to the authority that runs it. The canal defined the existence of the people who were related to it. And there were many more people who were related to the Canal without working for the authority.

Before the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, the accessibility for Egyptians to jobs in the Suez Canal Company was limited. Those who succeeded in joining the company were less privileged than their foreign colleagues. Yet people were admiring for the fact that they work for the company. Working for the company was a source of social prestige, a stable salary, and a sustainable job, especially for those who were not from merchant families. "When we saw someone riding a bicycle, we knew that he is an employee of the company," Abbas explained while talking about dwellers of *al arab* neighbourhood. At that time, few people owned private cars or bicycles. The majority walked or took cabriolets (horse-drawn carriages). And, the mere public bus line moved along *Kisra* Street in *al arab* neighborhood, as Abbas explained, emphasizing the smallness of the city on one hand, and the dichotomy between the dwellers of *al i'frang* and *al arab* on the other. Generally, the number of employees in the Suez Canal Company was very small in proportion to the city's population. Abbas remembered applying for a job at the company in 1955, and although he passed the work tests, he was not hired because he was Egyptian. The rule was to wait until another Egyptian employee died or retired and to then hire another as a replacement. In December 1956, 1,010 employees were working in the Company, including 453 Egyptian and 575 foreigners, according to the Suez Canal Annual Report of 1958 (p.28). Eight years later, the number had jumped to 10,174 employee (9,776 of them Egyptians), with the establishment of new factories and companies related to marine services as mentioned in the Suez Canal Annual Report of 1964 (p.116). Abbas was among those who

was hired by the Canal Authority after nationalization. *Al qobtan* was working for one of the private companies that provided services for ships while crossing the canal. In the 1960s, his company was nationalized, among other private companies, and merged with the Canal Authority. All of these actions increased the significance of the Canal Authority in the economic lives of the people of Port Said. Yet the activities related to the canal were more numerous and diverse than the Canal Company or Authority. The canal's activities were always open to more people than any institution.

Drawing on Latour (2005), we can here follow different actors who produced the port as a juncture between the outside world and Port Said, such as *al bamboutyah* who kept moving between the port and the city dealing with people from all over such as the foreign sailors and passengers who entered the city from the port to buy their needs, passing by hotels, bars, and casinos, as well as the gifts and goods that moved from inside to outside and vice versa, and the canal as a passageway linking different parts in the world. These ceaseless movements transformed the port (the place) to a juncture, a space of intersection among the local, the national, and the global, where people who were related to sea trading developed their identity and sense of belonging to the world. The space is produced through these movements and everyday operations, as was explained by Lefebvre (1991) and de Certeau (1984). Also, it can be argued here that a cosmopolitan Port Said was not merely produced as such through ethno-religious groups and the elitist commercial bourgeoisie, but also through *al bamboutyah* who were continuously moving between the port and the city, serving as a link between

these two worlds and collaborating with networks of suppliers and boats owners, and who were not necessarily multilingual or part of the elite of Port Said. Further, non-residents of Port Said such as foreign sailors and passengers who merely passed by or through the city engaged in the production of Port Said as a cosmopolitan city.

My interlocutors define themselves through work, lifestyle, clothing, and small belongings like *al qobtan* possessions. All of them related in one way or another to the sea. Even the self-perception of the Port Saidians toward themselves was linked to the sea. By the sea, I mean here both the Mediterranean and the canal. Both are mediators to connect Port Said with the world. Bahgat, the *Simsmyah* maker, emphasizes the affect of the sea clearly by attributing the sea as the source of a set of characteristics that distinguish the Port-Saidians from *al a'ghrab*, such as chasing liberty, refusing discipline, and hating restrictions. For instance, it was common among the Port-Saidians to see themselves as not fitting in jobs that require discipline. Bahgat was working in the prison of Port Said as a supervisor of the woodcrafts workshop, but he resigned because he could not survive the restricted rules of working there. He preferred to devote his time to his carpentry workshop and *Simsimyah*. Ismail, the son of Hajj Rizq, never liked his job in the petrochemical factory. He does not accept the tough restricted routine of the factory life, especially that he had previously worked in trading since he was young, but shifted to an industrial job as a result of the recession in Port Said after the 2011 revolution. For people like Hashim and *al qobtan*, the sea enabled them to interweave their lives with people from other places

in the world, increasing their social capital. Hashim was proud while telling me about captains he knew from Russia. "*Al bamboutyah* is a worldwide profession. I saw *bamboutyah* in all of the port cities I visited, in Turkey, Greece, and Russia. I was sitting for hours, watching them while they were working," Hashim gladly explained. The same pride and joyfulness could be noticed in the case of *al qobtan* while he was talking about the souvenirs he got from foreign sailors. For both Hashim and *al qobtan*, working in sea trading gave them a life that has a new face every day, which is not the case in the repetitive daily routine of working at a factory such as the one Ismailworks for.

(2)

Al tahgeer was a moment of rupture with the sea trading modality. The forced migration laid the groundwork for the land trading, which evolved with the declaration of FTZ. During the *al tahgeer* years, people were not able to practice their work. They were away from the space that allowed the sea trading modality and shaped their lives in the way they knew. Although this was the case in Suez and Ismailia, still the consequentiality of *al tahgeer* and the declaration of the FTZ transformed the city and reproduced it in quite a different way than it was before *al thageer*, as it will be explained in this chapter. In March 1976, President Sadat issued the decree no.24/1976 to declare Port Said a free trade zone. The decree was constituted of two articles. The first one declared the whole city to be a free trade zone, starting from January 1976, and authorized the president to issue following decrees to

regulate the FTZ. The second article was an order to publish this decree in the Official Gazette (*al gareedah al rasmeyah*), imposing it from the following day after its publishing. It was not the first time to think of establishing a free trade zone in Port Said. In 1964, the minister of finance issued the decree no.117/1964 to authorize the governor of Port Said to declare free trade zones in specific places in Port Said, allowing imported goods to be traded in these zones without adding customs fees. However, only foreign visitors were allowed to buy the commodities in these zones. Between 1965 and 1967, several decrees were issued to allow diplomats, Egyptian citizens who lived abroad, and employees of international organizations to buy commodities from these zones. In 1966, the legislation no.51/1966 was issued to establish a free trade zone in Port Fouad, aiming to gradually expanding it to the whole city. However, with the outbreak of the 1967 war, the project was halted. Neither was Port Said the first city to have a free trade zone in Egypt. In 1956, the economy and finance minister issued decree no.2 to establish the first free trade zone in Egypt within the port of Alexandria. Other decrees were issued in the same year to establish the free trade zones in the transport depot of Alexandria and in the Cairo Airport's terminals¹². However, all of these cases were limited in their capacity to transform the spaces they were located in. They aimed mainly to attract more foreign currency to the local market.

Drawing on Harvey (1989), the declaration of the FTZ can be explained as part of the shift from Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism, which emerged as a recurrent theme in the advanced capitalist world, starting from the 1970s

¹² For more information about the Free Trade Zone in Port Said and other cities in Egypt, see Mohamed Abbas (2001).

onward. Harvey explains this shift as a general consensus that “positive benefits are to be had by cities taking an entrepreneurial stance to economic development” (p.4). He asserts three features of this shift, developed from his work on Baltimore but that is applicable generally to other cities as well. First, entrepreneurialism has the notion of “public-private” partnership, “in which a traditional local boosterism is integrated with the use of the local government powers to try and attract external sources of funding new direct investments, or new employment sources” (p.7). Secondly, this public-private partnership is entrepreneurial because it is speculative rather than being rationally planned and coordinated (ibid). Thirdly, the entrepreneurialism focuses on the political economy of a specific place rather than a whole territory (ibid). Although these three features were derived from a city such as Baltimore, traces of the same shift can be traced in the case of Port Said. The idea of the FTZ in Port Said was to attract private investments to the city, hoping that these investments would aid in absorbing unemployment, generating money in the market, and generally helping in dealing with the recession of the 1970s. The declaration of the FTZ was speculative to the extent that the decree that started it was constituted of only two articles, as was previously mentioned, and the governing rules of the FTZ were declared after 22 months, with law no.12/1977 (Mohamed Abbas, 2001, p.262). Finally, the declaration of the FTZ addressed the political and economic issues of a specific city, and not as part of a national plane.

The declaration of the FTZ allowed the import and sale of duty-free goods within the borders of FTZ in Port Said. Port Said was franchised to

import duty-free goods with a specific quota, to avoid negative effects on the national economy. Two main customs offices were established at the southern entrance of Port Said, *al raswah*, and the north western entrance, *al gamil*, where people's belongings were inspected by police to estimate the required customs duty for the imported goods the people bought. A new extended network of relations was interwoven as a result of the FTZ. Most of the Port-Saidian traders who were impoverished during *al tahgeer* were not able to start their business directly. However, some of them managed to do so. "Some people borrowed money from banks to import goods, while others borrowed money from family members or people they knew," Hajj Rizq explains. At that time, Port Said attracted businessmen from outside the city, Egyptians and even Syrians and Lebanese, who started partnerships with Port-Saidians. Gradually, changes were triggered by the money that was injected into the market. Wholesalers started to buy commodities from importers, and retailers started to buy from wholesalers, selling goods to small stores and street vendors. Consumers from everywhere in Egypt flooded the streets of Port Said to buy foreign commodities, which were seen for the first time after almost two decades of Arab Socialist policies. Gad, who was mentioned in the previous chapter as the owner of a fish restaurant, said that traveling buses from all over Egypt would stop close to the train station. The area around the train station was full of visitors and street vendors. He opened a small fish restaurant there. The whole city, especially *al arab* neighborhood, turned into a market, where anyone could start his business, selling perfumes, clothes, fruits, chocolates, home appliances, cars, etc.

A person did not need either a large amount of capital or a place to start trading in Port Said. Ismail, the son of Hajj Rizq, preferred to be independent of his family. He decided to sell clothes on the beach to summer visitors. However, his father asked him to do anything else, but not this work, saying: "It is the work of *al a'ghrab*." Then, Ismail started to work as an independent vendor. He neither owned his goods nor worked for a specific person. Rather, he was like a middle man, attracting the client from the street to a store and selling him goods after adding his profit to the price. Then, he paid back the original price of the commodity to the owner of the store, taking his profit. The amount of money he gained depended on his bargaining skills. He was working for himself, enjoying the ability to change collaboration from one shop owner to another. His capital was the ability to convince the client to come and see the goods in this store or that, reaching a good deal with him. Ismail had to make a rapid assessment of each client to estimate what he or she needs and how much money the client can pay. This is how people work as infrastructure, through these connections between middlemen and shop owners, adjusting their offers to the clients according to quick assessments that have no written guidelines (Simone, 2004).

Although I did not visit Port Said during these golden years of the FTZ, one can illustrate an image of the city based on a popular movie that was filmed there in 1981. The name of the movie is *Al Mashbouh* (The Suspect). The story is about a thief who decides to give up thieving after coming too close to be arrested by a police officer. He gets married and decides to move to Port Said to work in trading there. He depends on a small amount of capital

to start working as a street vendor. In one of the scenes, he was standing in one of the streets of *al arab* neighborhood behind a table which was full of clothes, shouting as people in the street to attract clients to his merchandise. Although the movie was not focusing primarily on Port Said and the FTZ, it emphasized the fact that if someone wanted to start a business somewhere with a minimum of capital, Port Said could be just the place to do so.

Beside the commodities market, there was another market for import permits, the state documents that franchise specific persons to import goods with a specific amount of money. There are import permits, ranging from US \$2,400 to 66 thousand. The previous numbers signify the value of the goods that are allowed to be imported every year through this permit. Generally, Port Said has been assigned a specific quota for imports, hence, the number of permits was limited. It increased from time to time whenever the import quota for Port Said increased, which has always been a matter of contestation between Port-Saidians on one side, and other non-Port-Saidians businessmen on the other. Starting from 2002, the import quota of Port Said was decreased several times by the government, ushering an epoch of recession in the city that has continued until now (Saleh, 2012, July 18th). Going back to the market of import permits, not every permit holder chose to benefit from it in importing commodities. Rather, some permit holders passed their permits to other people who used the permit to import goods by using the name of the original owner. In other words, the import permit turned to be a commodity in itself. The exchange value of the permit was determined by various factors, such as its original value and the economic conditions of the

market in Port Said. A permit with high value could provide its owner a fortune every year that enabled him to stop working. With time, brokers started to appear to facilitate deals between permit holders and buyers, as did all the middlemen who appeared in each process related to trading in Port Said. There was a story that was repeated each time I interviewed anyone about the FTZ, a story about a belly dancer from Cairo who owned an import permit worth one million EGP without being either Port Saidian or a trader. Regardless of the truth of the story, it was told to indicate to what extent the permit market grew even beyond the borders of Port Said.

Smuggling was another facade of the FTZ. Imported commodities were not allowed to leave the FTZ without paying the required customs duties. However, controlling the borders of the whole city was almost impossible. "Smuggling started with the beginning of FTZ. Having customs offices means having smuggling activities. It is the rule, not only here but everywhere," Hajj Rizq explained. The government's attempted to stop smuggling by building a wall by the shore of *al Manzalah* lake. However, it was difficult to keep the lake under surveillance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, especially with the existence of fishing activities there. Fishing boats were also used to facilitate smuggling. For my interlocutors, smuggling sabotaged the FTZ. It deprived Port Said of its advantage of being the source of foreign commodities, allowing the latter to leak out. Hence, they blamed it again on *al a'ghrab* "who did not care about the city". For my interlocutors, smuggling was not something to be conducted by the Port-Saidian merchants, who already benefited from the FTZ and had no interest in sabotaging it. On the contrary,

al a'ghrab might not have a "place" in the city, so they did not mind participating in smuggling, regardless its destructive effect on Port Said, according to my interlocutors. When one of my interlocutors mentioned that *al ghareeb* (the stranger) might not have a place in the city, he did not explain exactly what he meant. However, the vagueness of the word "place" disclosed the meaning more than any other word. "The place" here is anything that could be a source of ownership of and belonging to the city, a place with which to identify. *Al ghareeb* was rendered as someone who does not belong because he has nothing to identify with in Port Said; he is seen as rootless. Customs officers, who were accused by my interlocutors of being involved in smuggling activities, were described also as *a'ghrab*, who sought to be relocated from other cities to Port Said, wishing to make money out of facilitating smuggling. "For them, Port Said was like the gulf countries," one of my interlocutors emphasized in a sarcastic tone, referring to the migration wave of Egyptian workers and middle-class professionals to oil-rich Persian Gulf countries during the economic depression in the 1970s and 1980s.

Ahl Al Qemmah (People on the Top) is another movie that was also produced in 1981. *Ali Bandrakhan*, the film's director, was known for his critical views toward the *infitah* policies. The movie was based on one of the novels by the Nobel Prize winning author Naguib Mahfouz. It was, again, about another thief who was working for a businessman from Cairo. The thief, named *Zaatar*, traveled to Port Said to facilitate smuggling on behalf of the businessman who was using his import company as a cover for his illegal activities. *Zaatar* was doing most of the risky work, such as bribing customs

officers, hiding valuable smuggled merchandise in a truck while leaving Port Said, etc. Later, he accumulated enough wealth to start his own business. He established an import company, recruited other thieves from his past life and proceeded with the smuggling business. In one of the scenes of the movie, Zaatar was trying to justify to his fiancée what he was doing by saying, "I turned poor thieves into rich people; this can happen only through a revolution. But I did it in my own way." The stories in these two films resonate with the stories of the belly dancer, the smugglers, the consumerist spirit which proliferated in Port Said, and the changes in the Port-Saidians' culture as it was described by my interlocutors. Together, they constitute a narrative about the "dirty money" that dishonored the land trading modality. Behind the moral judgment on land trading's morality, this narrative reflected an unease toward the FTZ and its effects on the city, although a large number of people made a profit out of it. I believe that this unease evolved after the destruction of the FTZ, which led to a catastrophic situation in Port Said, as it will be explained in the next section of this chapter.

The FTZ triggered massive social mobilization in the city, allowing people from the most deprived classes to become wealthier. As Gad described, "Those who succeeded in accumulating money were almost barefoot at the beginning." The transformative capacity of the FTZ was empowering on the one hand, and destructive on the other. For most of my interlocutors, the FTZ made people used to quick profits, spreading consumerism among Port-Saidians. "People were gaining money from the FTZ to spend on Cairo nightlife. During the weekends, you could see the

lineup of the Port-Saidian cars in *al Haram* street in Cairo in front of the nightclubs,” an interlocutor said in a resentful tone. Further, people abandoned their crafts to work in trading. “Now, we recruit craftsmen from other cities. The FTZ vanished but people forgot everything about other crafts except trading and smuggling,” Abbas said sorrowfully. This is the reason why he did not like the FTZ and its effects on Port Said and its people. Also, Bahgat asserted the same refusal attitude toward trading. He mentioned that he never liked trading during the FTZ period. Rather, he preferred to stick to his carpentry craft. For him, it was safer and more honorable. People will not cease needing a carpenter, whatever happened.

(3)

Different reasons negatively affected the sea trading modality, among them the declaration of the FTZ. At the beginning, the FTZ afforded *al bamboutyah* more commodities that could be sold on ships. However, with time, less people became interested in the *al bamboutyah* profession; land trading became more profitable. Yet other factors negatively affected *al bamboutyah* profession, such as the halt in issuing new licences, which led to the decrease in the number of *al bamboutyah*, starting from the 1970s. More was said on this subject in "The New Port Said" magazine. In the April 1983 issue, an article by a Port-Saidian parliamentarian tackled the negative effect of the establishment of the new bypass to the east of Port Said, which allowed more ships to enter the Canal without stopping in Port Said's harbor, shortening the waiting time for these ships but negatively affecting the sea trading activities. Further, after the 2011 revolution, most of the ships ceased

to stop at Port Said's harbor. Rather, they preferred to dock in the Mediterranean, waiting for permission to transit the canal. Companies were afraid of letting their ships wait in the harbor due to the lack of security in Egypt during that time. This resulted in reducing the number of ships that *al bamboutyah* could get aboard each day, especially with the increasing numbers of captains who refused to let *al bamboutyah* to get on their ships, to avoid issues between them and sailors, even during docking time in the harbor. Hashim said that the "outsiders" who invaded the *bamboutyah* profession in the last years were the reason of the increasing troubles on ships. He implicitly explained that the police officers favored these outsiders, and let them work in the harbor without *bambouty* licenses, because of the "services" they did for the police in previous times or generally because of their relations with the police officers. In general, Hashim believes that most of the people who work as *bamboutyah* now take this job merely as a source of money. "No one cares anymore about relationships as we were in the past," he explained.

Tourism was also affected in recent years. Starting from the 1970s, tourism agencies altered the business by organizing pre-scheduled programs for foreign passengers to visit tourist places outside Port Said, instead of letting them wandering the city freely. Since the 1970s, the city ceased to attract foreign tourists. Hashim remembered sadly how, in October 2016, a huge cruise ship with thousands of passengers and crew members docked in the harbor, raising hopes that Port Said would see a return of these old days. An employee from the tourism agency decisively refused to let the

passengers and the crewmembers step outside the harbor, insisting on taking them directly, with company busses, to catch up with their touristic schedule, although officials from the harbor and the police directory tried to convince him to let the tourists visit the city.

The new modality of trading reassembled the social in a different manner. Land trading was not arranged through family ties as in the sea trading modality. For instance, most *al bamboutyah* inherited their licenses from older family members. Land trading was more open to anyone, even non Port-Saidians who moved to the city specifically for this reason. Starting from the 1970s, the target audience of trading shifted from foreign visitors to Egyptians from other cities, who were heading to Port Said to buy imported commodities. Land traders (street vendors, middle men such as Ismail, importers, newcomers to Port Said) and local visitors to Port Said are new actors who reassembled the social in a different way, reproducing the city as a space that is not associated with the sea as it was in the past. Port Said is still a port city. But the meaning of the port altered from being the junction between the city and the world to a mere gate for imported commodities, which ceased to have the same value as the gifts and goods that were given to and exchanged with *al bamboutyah* during their work on ships. The imported commodities are detached from social relations that produced it as any fetishized commodity, while the gifts gains its value from these relations. The red napkin of *al qobtan* is valuable not because of its exchange value, but because it is an evidence of this relationship between *al qobtan* and this foreign sailor, the city and the sea, the local and the global.

Space also was reproduced in a different way, with new spatial practices and movements. With time, gift shops, casinos, bars, and hotels started to disappear, especially with the emigration of foreigners from Port Said, which started in the 1950s. The trading hub moved from the harbor and *al i'frang* district to the *al arab* neighborhood, ushering in a spatial transformation of the city. *Al i'frang* lost its centrality in favor of the *Al arab* neighborhood, which turned to be the center of the city. With the decay of sea trading and the rise of land trading, trade shifted from being a way to communicate with the world to be an affair confined to the local. For sea trading, mobility was part of the modality, while in land trading, confining mobility was the core of the modality. Sea trading depended on the mobility of ships in the Suez Canal, and the wandering of foreign visitors in the city, while land trading depended on preventing imported commodities from exiting the FTZ, using walls and gates at the entrances of the city. The imported cars, which carry licenses of the free trade zone, were not allowed to stay outside Port Said for more than 90 days each year. They were valuable duty-free commodities. They had to be confined within the city borders. Each time a person took their car to get out the city, the police officer at the gate recorded the exit date in a small record, which should be kept with the driver. Later, the officer would record the entry date, ensuring that the total time the car spent outside Port Said did not exceed 90 days. To expand the time that was allowed for the car outside the city, a person could buy a new record after finishing the first one. It was an irony that being a "free city," as part of the (*infitah*) policy, meant more control and confinement.

With the shift from one trading paradigm to another, a sense of disorientation haunted those who are attached to the decaying sea trading modality. For them, the city has become unrecognizable. Hashim explicitly expressed this feeling of disorientation by saying that, "I was a *bambouty* for 26 years. And now I feel that my life has gone in vain." Hashim preferred now to stop working as a *bambouty*, leaving his position in the Sea Traders Association, and devoting his time to help his son in running his clothing shop. Hashim travels every month to Turkey, using his connections there to import clothes to his son's store. Although *al bamboutyah* did not disappear, the profession became marginal in the current era. It lost its value as a profession connecting its people to the world through the sea. Now, *al qobtan's* belongings are mere debris of the sea trading modality, which was swept away. When *al qobtan* was performing the *al bamboutyah* dance, he himself became ruins of the life of sea trading. The dance became the monument of the sea trading. He and his dance were reduced to mere folklore that belongs to the territory of the past.

Land traders have their share of disorientation also. Although I did not visit Port Said during the golden years of the FTZ, I can sense the vibrant life of *al arab* neighborhood through my interlocutors' accounts about these years. I can see the streets are full of visitors and vendors, and the queue of cars and busses at the gates of the city waiting for the customs officers to inspect them. I always heard these stories from my older relatives about their trips to Port Said, in the 1970s and 1980s, to buy foreign clothes and home

appliances before marriage. Port Said was the destination for a lot of the middle-class families to buy their needs. The city now looks totally different. Trading is dead after years of recession and consecutive decisions to decrease the import quota of the city. With time, Port Said has lost its advantage as the source of imported commodities. Now, one can buy whatever one wants in any location. The economic recession following the 2011 revolution added more wounds to the city. I walked through the *al arab* neighborhood, in the same streets that in the past were busy with selling and buying. Now, the streets are devoid of visitors. I was walking alone in an open museum of mannequins located on the streets, outside the shops, displaying clothes that had no buyers. Even the traders showed no interest in attracting me to their merchandise. For me, the grids of *al arab* neighborhood looked like an open museum of a destroyed life that was transformed into rubble of the past, as it was explained by Gordillo (2014). I asked Ismail, who had to shift his career to survive, "If the situation gets better, will you get back to practice trading?" He replied:

Nothing can make the situation better. The state can prolong the life of the FTZ, as it already does, by renewing its import quota. However, this will not make any difference. The increasing value of US dollars will affect the prices of the imported commodities. The poverty of the majority of Egyptians will not allow them to buy anything with these current expensive prices. At the beginning, the FTZ was providing commodities that were not found anywhere else in Egypt. Now, you can find everything everywhere. Why would anybody come to Port Said?

The death of land trading in Port Said is reflected in the reckless attitude of customs officers at the gates of the city. During my continuous visits to Port Said for five months, my bag was inspected just once, as if everyone agrees with Ismail; trading in Port Said is dead. Everything is mere rubble now, from the market and the gates to the land traders themselves.

Chapter 3:

Simsimyah has a Story to Tell

We are al bamboutyah

No one resembles us

We are the sea traders,

*working in the Canal*¹³

In mid-November 2016, I wrote in my field notes that I had been naive at the beginning to have neglected following *Simsimyah* during my visits to Port Said. Initially, I had designed my field research to focus mainly on the modalities of tradings, the different patterns of relationships with the state, the group formation, and spatial transformations. However, with time, the field started to lead me through the loci of the remaking of Port Said. *Simsimyah* is one of these loci. I wrote in my field notes;

It is not accidental that Bahgat, who wanted to identify himself with a specific narrative about Port Said, decided to tie himself to the making of *Simsimyah*. He always describes the real Port-Saidian as honest, life lover and liberty seeker, instead of the opportunist person who seeks quick profit. He associated the latter with the free trade zone and its effects on the city. Also, Bahgat attributes what he perceives as the real Port-Saidian to the sea. *Simsimyah* maintains the same narrative about Port-Saidians. I could not find a song about the free trade zone,

¹³ From the song: *ehna al bamboutyah* (we are *al bamboutyah*).

although there are songs about *bamboutyah*, fishermen, *al tahgeer*, the resistance during 1956 war, love, and life. This silence says something. I wrote these lines, admitting my naivety the day that followed one of *Simsimyah* nights of *al tanbourah* band in *al nigmah* casino. It was my first time to attend one of these Wednesday nights for *al tanbourah* band which is the biggest *Simsmyah* band now in Port Said. It was founded in 1988 by *al Rayes* Younes (chief Younes). The notion behind forming the band was to revive the art of *Simsimyah*, after less than a decade of decay. In 30 years, *al tanbourah* succeeded in bringing back old *Simsmyah* musicians and singers while also introducing new ones. After 2011 revolution, new bands have been established in Port Said, reviving the golden years of *Simsimyah*.

When I told the taxi driver to take me to *al nigmah* casino, he smiled and asked me “are you going to attend the *Simsmyah* concert?”. I said “yes” with a smile too. I did not know the time of the concert. So, I arrived one hour and half before, to find the casino empty. For years, *al tanbourah* used to organize these Wednesday nights on the shore of the Mediterranean in Port Fouad. There were no tickets or reservations. The audience just paid for their drinks. The band did not make any money out of these regular concerts, was just a matter of keeping the rapport with the audience. Beside these nights, *al tanbourah* was participating as the main *Simsmyah* band in the celebrations of December 23rd¹⁴ and spring festival¹⁵ in Port Said. The chairs of spectators

¹⁴ December 23rd, or the Victory Day is the anniversary of the retreat of the last soldier of the French and British armies from Port Said in 1956, after the tripartite aggression on Egypt which followed the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian State. The day was chosen to be the national day of Port Said. Every year, a popular celebration takes place in the streets of Port Said, where *Simsmyah* musicians and singers perform songs related to the civilian resistance during the

were lined up in rows to face the stage where the band would sit. *Al tanbourah band* attended with its full capacity this time. Almost twenty members were sitting in U-shape, two *Simsimyah* musicians, four drummers, 11 singers with *al Rayes* Younes in the middle. The casino was full of spectators from different generations and classes, with a majority of men but also families that included women and children. With the consecutive songs, the spectators started to interact. On the right side of the casino, there was a group of old men; a friend told me that “they are loyal fans who always occupy this spot on Wednesday nights”. One of them was clapping his thick palms enthusiastically and seriously in a constant rhythm without missing a beat. When the band started to sing “we are *al bamboutyah*” song, another man from the same group stood up and entered the realm of the band to dance

1956 war. Usually, other bands from Suez and Ismailia cities participate in the celebration.

¹⁵ Spring festival or *sham al nassim* is believed to be the oldest festivals in Egypt. It is on the first Monday after the Easter. In Port Said, there is the Allenby ritual that takes place in *sham al nasem*. Every Easter, dummies of Lord Allenby are made and burnt in bonfire. The tradition is believed to date back to the 1920s, when people started to burn the dummies of Lord Allenby. However, every year local artists choose different political figures to be burnt in the festival. According to Alia Mossallam (2012, p. 125), the reason why the dummy of Lord Allenby was burnt may be linked to his role in containing and suppressing the 1919 revolution while he was the High Commissioner of Egypt between 1919-1925. Mossallam (ibid) adds, “with time, his story seems to have lost significance, as people have come to refer to life-size dummies as (*Allenbies*) not always knowing who Allenby was”. In the Easter of 1957, British generals of the 1956 war were the new *Allenbies* (ibid). Mossallam (ibid) also mentioned that she was told by some respondents that some of President Sadat’s ministers were made as *Allenbies* after the enforcement of the open door economic policy. It was difficult to list the figures that were chosen to be the Allenby from the 1920 until now. However, most of the people, it talked to, remembered that Israeli leaders such as Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon were chosen to be the *Allenbies*. I remember in 2003, with the American war on Iraq, George W. Bush was made as *allenby*, although the Egyptian government tried to stop the ritual of burning *Allenby*, claiming its concern of the public safety. After the 2011 revolution, three of Mubarak’s significant men were made as *Allenbies*, Mubarak: Zakaria Azmi (former chief of presidential staff), Fathi Surur (former speaker of parliament), and Habib al ‘Adli (former interior minister) (p.126).

with his huge belly, despite his elderliness. People were often entering the band circle to participate in an enthusiastic dance, blurring the borderline between the musicians and spectators, while other people were just saluting some of the band members and sitting beside them. Several times, the singers themselves were standing and starting a spontaneous dance without any sort of organized steps. The act of blurring the borderline between the realms of the musicians and the spectators kept happening to the extent that it became difficult to differentiate between the two groups of people. The voices of the singers were rough, opposite to what is used for singing, while the voice of *Simsimyah* was sharp, and the rhythm of its music was fast, leading to an adrenaline rush, pushing everyone to clap hands excitedly with the rhythm. Dancers were using their hands to mimic the moves of *al bamboutyah* and fishermen, while moving their legs fastly. The rhythm of the night accelerated until the moment when *Al Rayes* Younes held the microphone to sing the last song. Before this moment, he was sitting in the middle of the band, with his charismatic character, bushy mustache, and bald head. After each song, the singer gave him the microphone. He chose the next singer, and handled him the microphone. When he stood up, it was a sign that the night came to its end. The audience praised him passionately, before listening to the song he chose to end the concert.

Simsimyah is a popular local collective singing genre in the Canal area, which started in Port Said in 1930s, according to Abbas and *Al Rayes* Younes. It was preceded by another singing genre, *al dammah*, which means “the gathering” in Arabic. *Al dammah* was another kind of collective singing,

but it was mainly influenced by sufi music. The songs of *al dammah* varied from sufi to platonic love songs. It gained its name from the act of gathering, when working men gathered at the end of a working day in the house of one of them and sang *al dammah* songs with its slow rhythm, accompanied with tambour and sometimes triangle musical instrument. With time, some of the singers gained a reputation as *al dammah* sheikhs, and became popular in the city. They were asked by families to sing in special occasions, such as marriage and pilgrimage. However, there were no professional singers. They did not earn their living from *al dammah*. Rather, they were workers and artisans who practiced *al dammah* out of love for this genre and its social rituals.

Simsimyah inherited a lot of *al dammah* specificities, although the antagonism between them at the beginning. I attempted to understand the differences and similarities between them. So, I visited *Al Rayes Younes* in *al mastabah* cultural center for folkloric arts in Cairo, which he also founded. *Al Rayes Younes* is a local artist with leftist intellectual background. His cultural center is constituted of a small sound recording studio and a library of audio recordings of *al dammah* and *Simsimyah* songs. He devoted years of his life collecting the heritage of *al dammah* and *Simsimyah* from the sheikhs in the Canal city. According to the oral narrative he documented, Port Said started to know *Simsimyah* when the nubian musician Abdallah Kabarbar arrived the city in 1930s, carrying his *Simsimyah* instrument. It is believed that he emigrated from Upper Egypt as part of the migration waves that followed heightening Aswan Dam, leading to the flooding of some of the Nubian

villages. He moved among the Canal cities teaching people how to use *Simsimyah*. In Port Said, he found his first followers among musicians who were involved in *Zar* practices which was a sort of healing music that dealt with the supernatural powers that were believed to have control over human bodies. At that time, Sudanese and Nubians were famous as people who were able to help others to restore peace with these supernatural powers, healing souls and bodies through their ritualistic music. *Zar* people were using *al tanbourah* which was a quite similar instrument to *Simsimyah*. But, The former were bigger than the latter, and had a deeper voice. *Kabarbar* found his first followers among *al tanbourah* musicians, *sanagiq*¹⁶ (the plural noun of *songoq*) as people used to name them. He started to teach some of these *sanagiq*, who were interested in learning the techniques of playing *Simsimyah*. However, *Kabarbar* and his followers were not able to reach the audience. *Al dammah* was dominating the sphere at that time, preventing anything new to shake its ground. Hence, *Kabarbar* started from a peripheral space, *al makhanah* which was the Port-Saidian hashish cafe. For *al dammah* people, *Simsimyah* was inappropriate, associated with hashish and disreputable people, opposite to the spirituality of *al dammah*. They refused to include *Simsimyah* and its people into their gatherings, protecting their domination of the sphere. With the tripartite aggression on Egypt during the Suez crisis in 1956, *Simsimyah* gained a huge momentum. *Al dammah* was not able to keep up with the events with its slow rhythm and heritage songs, while *Simsimyah* was faster, and unchained by heritage songs. New *Simsimyah* songs were able to reflect the intensity of the moment, playing the

¹⁶ *Sanagiq* are the people who play on *al tanbourah* during *Zar*. I was not able to detect the origin of the word.

role of boosting morale, and documenting the history of the battle for Port Said, as in the song by Mohamed abo Youssif, *Ya Port Said Ya Shabab Wa Rigal* (Oh Port Said of Youth and Men),

It was a British conspiracy; planned with French deliberation,
With the Jews they were a gang conspiring
For seven nights and a morning,
With planes and tanks they charged; their failed attacks fell hard,
And we with our guns defended, for seven nights and a morning,
They blocked the Canal and nothing passes through;
They cut off water, the light too,
Life's become difficult and weary,
These seven nights and a day¹⁷

That was the moment when *Simsimyah* had enough power to replace *al dammah*, and to inherit its position.

During the 1956 war, singing *Simsimyah* songs was compared to the writing of the history, as it was described by Mossallam (2012). Mossallam relied on songs and oral history interviews to reassemble the narratives of this moment in Port Said. She argued, “[the singing of songs] is something [the singers] do collectively to bring different aspects of events together. Respondents also compared it to ‘the making of history’ as they attempt to assert and create political stances through their singing” (p.91). Some songs

¹⁷ “Seven nights and a morning” was the duration of the bombing of Port Said between the night of 31 October and the morning of 7 November, during the tripartite aggression. The lyrics of the song was translated by Mossallam (2012), and mentioned in her study about *Nasserism, popular politics and songs in Egypt 1956-1973*.

were documenting specific events during the war, as in Abbas's song about the soldier Sa'id Hamada, who was the security guard of the Italian consulate. When the British bombing of Port Said was intensified on 5th and 6th November 1956, the Italian consular asked him to enter the consulate building, fearing for his safety. But Hamada refused to leave his position, shooting back on the fighter planes, as the song narrates his story, until his death. Abbas, who started to write songs and poems in 1956, wrote this song to commemorate Hamada's courage,

Listen to this story of a soldier of freedom,
Son of our country, the martyr, Sa'id,
He stands with his arms firm to his sides,
Protecting the foreigners in his country...
The Italian consular in all his humanity,
Called to "Sa'id, 'Come in for safety!
Save yourself from the carnage,
And to your courage we will always be indebted¹⁸.

Drawing on Khalili's (2007) work on the Mnemonic narratives, which was mentioned also in chapter one, It can be argued that through *Simsimyah* songs, the heroic identity of the Port-Saidians was forged. On 23rd December of every year, *al tanbourah* band organize a street performance in *al arab* neighborhood to celebrate the Victory Day, or the national day of Port Said, recalling these moments through songs about the people's struggle and fight

¹⁸ The lyrics of the song was translated by Mossallam (2012), and mentioned in her study about *Nasserism, popular politics and songs in Egypt 1956-1973*.

for their city and families. The annual rituals of remembering this moment of victory kept being repeated in the last 30 years to maintain the heroic identity of the Port-Saidians. What helped to sustain this identity was the fact that the battle of Port Said was integrated in the official narrative of the state. The heroic narrative about the Port-Saidians helped to avoid questioning the military failure to protect the city from invasion (Mossallam, 2012, 89). On the other hand, the Port-Saidians “relate their battle to the greater battle [against imperialism], and their community to Nasser’s greater framed imagined community. Not, however, without emphasizing their own politics which drove and continues to drive their political activism” (ibid). The struggle of the Port-Saidians during the tripartite aggression, and the songs which represented these struggles, produced Port Said as an icon of resistance in the national imagination. Beside the popular celebration, there is an official one. As I was told by different interlocutors, Nasser and Sadat were attending ceremonies in Port Said every year on 23rd December, opening new projects in the city. There is also the Military Museum in Port Said which commemorate the popular resistance in 1956, yet without forgetting to underline “the state leadership” of this resistance.

On the contrary, the popular resistance in Suez against the Israeli equation between 1967 and 1973 wars did not occupy the same position in the national imagination. As Mossallam (2012, p. 207) emphasized,

There are, however no monuments, statues, or museums in Suez and little documentation marking the popular struggle that began in 1967 and lasted until 1974. There is no commemoration of the defeat in

1967 and those who died fighting under poor leadership, nor of the 101 days of popular resistance that followed the October 6 'victory'¹⁹. It is as if the state has made no attempt to impose a fragile narrative of its defeats and victories lest it risk the possibility of having to recognise or accommodate the narratives of the people of Suez.

In the narrative about the popular resistance in Suez, *Simsimyah* songs, which was produced by the *Simsimyah* singers and musicians in Suez, represent an alternative narrative to the hegemonic one, produced by the state, which focuses merely on the "military victory" in 1973 war.

During 1950s and 1960s, *Simsimyah* became mainstream in Port Said, inheriting the same collective nature of *al dammah*. It even adapted some of *al dammah* songs and readjusted its melody to its fast rhythm. Gradually, *Simsimyah* singers and musicians started to be asked to join familial occasions, such as marriage and pilgrimage. Among Port-Saidians, certain families built reputation as *Simsimyah* families, such as *Al Basous*, *Gamal Admah*, *Abo Al Morsy*, *Al Rayes al Dash*, and *Al Ashry*. In these families, there were various members who were participating in *Simsimyah* nights which used to be known as *Dammit al Simismyah* (the *Simsimyah* gathering) or *sohbet Al Simismyah* (*Simsimyah* companionship). Abo Nader, a contemporary *Simsimyah* musician and singer, told me that *Al Mosahyaty* was moving on his bicycle, telling the *Simsimyah* people to join the *Simismyah* gatherings. Until that moment, practicing *Simsimyah* was not a profession. People who were playing it were workers, artisans, truck drivers, *bamboutyah*,

¹⁹ For more information about the popular resistance during the 1973 war read chapter six: Suez, the Six Years War: A History of their own, in Mossallam's dissertation (2012).

etc. *Simsimyah* has been developed, and turned to be part of the social life of the Port-Saidians. Singing the songs took place in cafes, familial occasions, and street performances. *Simsimyah* families played the major role in developing *Simsimyah* by providing it with poets, musicians, and singers. Although playing *Simsimyah* required talent, most of its singers, poets and musicians were illiterate (Mossallam, 2012). Songs were transmitted by heart.

Around *Simsimyah*, specific forms of sociality were created such as *Dammit Al Simismyah* and *Sohbet Al Simismyah* where people formulated different relations with themselves, and with each other. Outside these gatherings, they were ordinary people working in different fields. They were workers, artisans, and truck drivers who might not be different than their fellows, and might not have any direct relation to each other. Within the *Simsimyah* gatherings, their personalities gained additional layer; the layer of the singers. With *simismyah* songs, they could be heard and noticed. What connected them to these gatherings was the ability of *Simsimyah* to transform them to someone else. There is a common word to describe the act of participation in these gatherings, *nistihaz* which literally means to gain luck. The word turns the word *haz* (luck) to a verb. It is derived from another common expression, *sa'it haz* (an hour of luck). Hence, the time they spend in the *Simsimyah* gatherings is *sa'it haz* (an hour of luck) and what they do there is to gain luck. Both expressions describe the gathering as outstanding time, differs from the ordinary, their lives as workers, artisans, and truck drivers. This is the reason why most of the *Simsimyah* gathering are organized at night, after the working day.

One of the *Simsimyah* gatherings which I attended, was in *makhanah*. Bahgat accompanied me to the place, saying that he thought it would be more useful for me to meet the *Simsimyah* people in their natural place rather than setting a meeting in another place. *Al makhanah* was just like other cafes, a small place with limited number of wooden tables and chairs. It was still early. So, the place was almost empty, but after one hour, clients started to occupy the empty chairs. Bahgat took me to a specific table on the left side of the cafe, where a group of 5 men were sitting. These were the members of *Sawf al Karawan Simsimyah* band. The band was established in the late 2000s by Abou Islam who was born and raised in a family of musicians. Three of his uncles were *Simsimyah* musicians. During the 1970s and 1980s, he was trained by the *Simsimyah* sheikhs. As all of the members of the band, Abou Islam was not a professional singer; he did not make his living from singing. He was a worker at one of the companies of the Suez Canal Authority since the 1980s. After the long working day, the members of the band gathered in this cafe to entertain themselves. "Here, we sing for ourselves. The best singing we do is in gatherings like this one" Abou Islam said. The band also organized public concerts in Port Said, but still the closest time to their hearts was when they sang for themselves.

The waiter was moving between the tables with *shisha* loaded by hashish. Each one around the table took several puffs before handing the *shisha* to the next person. After several rounds of smoking hashish, the singers and musicians were ready to start singing. Abou Islam started to sing

while playing on his *Simsimyah*. People in the cafe started to interact by clapping their hands. In each song, there was a main singer and the rest of the band were repeating the lyrics after him. In the next song, another member would be the main singer, the others would repeat after him, and so on. Everyone had his chance to play the leading role for a couple of minutes. For each singer, this was the moment to remember, the moment that goes beyond the ordinary. Following the Latourian framework, *Simsimyah* in that sense is an actor. On one hand, it contributes to the making of the social through allowing forms of sociality, and, on the other, it contributes to the production of subjectivity of the singers and musicians.

Al Tahgeer affected *Simsimyah* deeply by spreading it among the Port-Saidian. In each spot where the Port-Saidians emigrated to, a *Simsimyah* band was established. The immigrant bands, as they were named at that time, were singing mainly for the rubble of the city, clinging to the hope of returning to Port Said one day, as in this song by Abbas,

Oh the city of the lighthouse and the Canal

Oh the city of the strength and the struggle

Oh Port Said my home

Oh Port Said my home

I stand here protecting my Canal

I stand here protecting my sand

I pass by the doors,

waiting for the return of my neighbors

Oh Port Said my home

Oh Port Said my home

As it was previously mentioned in the second chapter, Abbas was one of *al mostabqeen*, who remained in Port Said to perform services for the army. In the last song, he was singing for *al mostabqeen* who stayed to protect the city, waiting for their neighbors to return. Another song by Abbas illustrated a picture of the abandoned city before *al thageer*, remembering how it was before the war,

My heart livens up
when it sees a building
beside another building
It cheers up
when it sees a garden
irrigated by a human's hand
I like to see ships,
while they are
loading and unloading
I adore the sound of the sea,
its breath and sand,
while sitting in sunshade,
watching a kid
collects seashells
[...]
I grieve for

the abandoned factories,
the dark houses,
people without smiles
without souls,
waiting for the hand
that will revive their lives,
knocking their doors
[...]
Be strong my country
in tough years,
the hope persists

“*Simsimiyah* was the friend who consoled us in our tribulation”, *Al Rayes* Younes said, describing the *Simsimiyah* as an actor or an agent that stood beside them in the tough years. During *al tahgeer*, more people started to join *Simsimiyah* bands, while new generations of poets were born. Even among *al-mostabqeen*, new bands were established. Abbas formed his *Simsimiyah* band, *Shabab Al Nasr* “the youth of victory”, from those who stayed in Port Said. He was writing lyrics and composing music. The members of the band had never practiced *Simsimiyah* before that moment. They were members of the National Guard and the civil resistance²⁰. The main musician of *Shabab Al Nasr* was Abdallah al-American, who was working for the military hospital in Port Said. “We were singing for the soldiers and *al-mostabqeen* in the summer theater on the shore of the sea, in the state

²⁰ Paramilitary troops which were organized by the state during the time of 1956 and 1967-73 wars to protect the city.

cultural palace of the city, in the workers club, and in the military camps” Abbas remembered. Later, the band started to wander Delta, singing for *al-mohaggaren*. “We visited Al Mansoura, Tanta, Damietta, Al Mahallah, and Al Matariyeh, singing for our people, consoling them and raising hope that we would return to our city one day” Abbas added. During *al tahgeer*, *Simsimyah* became the connection with the distant city, and the reminder that there was a life which was left behind. The life was not swiped away, but waiting for the people to re-inhabit it. For *Simsimyah* people, their city/life existed as long as the people remembered it through their songs. Analysing this by using Benjamin’s work (1969b) on the storyteller, we can say that *Simsimyah* is a storyteller who was telling *al mohaggaren* the news of their city and *al mostabqeen*, reminding them of their lives before *al tahgeer*. Drawing on Latour (2005), *Simsimyah* here is also an actor who is not only telling stories and transmitting experiences, but also contributing to the production of *al mohaggaren* as Port-Saidians again through gatherings from time to time to sing. *Simsimyah* was the thing that reconnected *al mohaggaren* to the city that they were away from. The metaphors in the songs worked as vehicles, bridging spaces that separated the Port-Saidians from their city. Drawing on de Certeau (1984) , singing was a spatial practice that took place everyday, affording *al mohaggaren* short visits to Port Said, reproducing the latter as home. The absence of the city was converted to presence through *Simsimyah* songs.

The prevalence of *Simsimyah* among Port-Saidians during *al tahgeer* laid the ground for establishing professional bands after returning to the city in

the 1970s. For Abo Nader “the leap of *Simsimiyah* started with the declaration of the FTZ. People started to be richer. More wedding ceremonies were arranged in the streets of the city, which resulted in increasing the demand on *Simsimiyah* from people who were able to pay”. For him, this helped *Simsimiyah* bands to get developed. Each band started to have its own poet and composer who produced new songs, building the heritage of *Simsimiyah*. Some of these bands, such as Hassan Al Ashry’s band gained wide popularity among the Canal cities. He even produced Cassettes with his songs, and some of them were broadcast in the radio. Abo Nader kept moving among these bands, attempting to learn from each one of them. However, this success did not last for long time. Younes said it lasted merely for few years after the return. Starting from the late 1970s, the famous *Simsimiyah* figures retired one by one, no new songs were produced. When I asked Abo Nader about the reason of this retreat, he was not able to give an explanation, but Al Rayes Younes suggested that it was the result of the commercialization of *Simsimiyah*. For him, the bands started to focus more on gaining money from wealthy people than on producing art. Bahgat thought it is the shift of the audience taste that lead to abandon the *Simsimiyah*; people like Hassan Al Ashry and other *Simsimiyah* figures stopped working when they sensed the wind of change. What remained in the market was the “commercial *Simsimiyah*”, which focused mainly on gaining money from singing in the wedding parties, and the state sponsored band in the cultural palace of Port Said. The latter was mainly performing in the cultural palace and official occasions, such as the official celebration of the victory day on 23rd December. It rendered *Simsimiyah* as a mere folklore, depriving it from being

part and parcel of the daily social life as it was in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1988, *al tanbourah* started its long process to revive *Simsimyah*.

Al Tanbourah forged a different path. *Al Rayes* Younes attempted to maintain a sort of independence for his band by avoiding being commercial. In the first years, he managed to finance his band from his own money and savings, depending on the revenue he had got from a workshop he had owned. He did not want to gain money from their performance to avoid being affected by the forces of the market and the will of who owned the money, as he described. He succeeded in convincing some of retired musicians to join *al tanbourah*, and being paid monthly salary. The old musicians started to teach new volunteers, transmitting knowledge to them. People started to know about the band by attending its weekly rehearsals, which turned to be weekly concerts, such as the one I attended in *al nigmah* casino. With time, *al tanbourah* built its audience in Port Said. Then, it started to perform in other cities and villages in Egypt. Over the years, cultural hubs and centers noticed *al tanbourah* and invited them to play in Cairo. Younes managed to have support grants from foreign cultural institutions, which helped the band to sustain its work. The band started to be well known even abroad. They were invited to different festivals in Paris, London, Berlin, and other cities around the world. Locally, Younes refused to accept playing at any familial occasions, while he kept performing in *al nigmah* casino and in other street performances in the victory day or the spring festival in April²¹. This approach attempted to

²¹ During the 2011 revolution, *Al tanbourah* organized 5 *Simsimyah* nights in Tahrir Square among the protesters. In the months that followed the revolution, the band participated in various concerts and activities in different governorates including

represent a rupture with the commercialization approach in 1970s, which is blamed to be the reason behind the decay of *Simsimyah*. The non-commercial approach remains with some of the newly established bands in the current years. Bahgat and Abo Nader spent years in *al tanbourah* before leaving it during the 2000s and forming the new band *Sawt al Karawan*. In their conversations with me, they justified this split by saying that they became uncomfortable with the grants money, thinking that money changed the dynamics among *al tanbourah* members. They were seeking ultimate dedication to *Simsimyah*, and pure loyalty to art without any material benefits.

The non-commercial approach of *al tanbourah* created a problematic situation. It intended to protect the band from being a “wedding parties band”, such as the commercial *Simsimyah* bands in the late 1970s, the term that was coined by Younes during our conversation. By commercial *Simsimyah* bands, he was referring to the bands that were participating in wedding parties, to encourage the wedding guests to pay money for the married couple, by calling the guests’ names, saluting them and asking them to “salute” the married couple by giving them money which is known as “*noqtah*”. These bands were sharing *noqtah* with the married couple, and that was their source of income. Younes perceives this as a humiliating way to practice *Simsimyah*, because “these bands, after a while, ceased to sing, they were just focusing on the process of collecting *noqtah*”, as he stated. This is the reason behind his refusal to let *al tanbourah* participate in familial social occasions. However, this prevented *al tanbourah* from being part of the social life of the Port

Cairo, Alexandria and Tanta, called itself the “Lowest Council of Culture” mocking the state’s Supreme Council of Culture (Kalfat, 2013).

Saidians, as *Simsimyah* was in its early years. Further, the involvement of *al tanbourah* in the “Culture Industry”, through performing in festivals and cultural hubs in Cairo, rendered *al tanbourah* as other bands, risking its spontaneity and sociality. Yet, in the public and street performances of *al tanboura*, one can find traces of this sociality and spontaneity. In general, Younes attempted to sustain a critical position between two worlds: the world of professional bands who perform onstage and according to a prepared program, and the world of spontaneity, collectivity and sociality of *Simsimyah* which I saw in *al nigmah* cafe and the street performances.

After 2011 revolution, more bands were established, following the same non-commercial approach. Beside *al tanbourah* Wednesday nights, there are other *Simsimyah* nights in other places in Port Said. *Sohba* band, which was founded in 2015 by a group of young *Simsimyah* musicians, plays in one of the cafes on the sea of Port Said. *Sawt al Salam* band plays in Saad Zaghoul public garden in *al arab* neighbourhood. Another band plays in the customs employees club. In most of these nights, I found families attending the concerts. Those bands do something more than providing entertainment. They open more space for the past with its narratives to be reproduced in the contemporary, neglecting the period of the FTZ, despite the fact that the current non-commercial approach to produce and consume *Simsimyah* is indeed a reaction toward what happened during the FTZ epoch.

This long story of *Simsimyah* tells a lot about the city and the different ways in which it was produced. It could be said that *Simsimyah* maintained a

certain narrative about the city, as the daughter of the sea and the Canal, documenting the critical events in the life of the city such as in 1956 and 1967-73, and playing a major role during *al tahgeer* as the locus of the reproduction of the city and its people. For people such as Bahgat and Younes, who did not favor the FTZ, *Simsimyah* was a point of departure to remake the city in their own way, linking it to the pre-FTZ period. *Simsimyah* has this ability to recall certain fragments of the history of Port Said, certain past which is related to the resistance during the 1956 war, and the relation between the city and the sea and the Canal, neglecting the period of the FTZ with all of its complexities that were discussed in the last chapter. Bahgat mentioned once that he was happy because more young men now started to value participating in activities such as *Simsimyah* bands, which made him felt as if Port Said was reviving again. He even turned part of his carpentry workshop to a museum of *Simsimyah*, called *al turathyah* “the heritage”. He collected old *Simsimyahs*, hanged them on the wall with information cards that tell the year of the manufacturing of each one. Almost each time, I was visiting Bahgat I found a group of young *Simsimyah* musicians and singers there, playing for themselves. Yet, this very simple act reinforces more and more the existence of *Simsimyah* in Port Said, with all the narratives about the city and its people, reproducing these narratives materially through gaining more believers. Bahgat expanded his boundaries more, by adding few taken off meters from the street to his museum. Further, he was organizing annual gallery of *Simsimyah* in a specific street corner, in al arab neighbourhood, during the spring festival. In this gallery, he displayed old *Simsimyahs* and sold new ones for beginners. He even manufactured small ones for children,

wishing that he could encourage more people to learn *Simsimyah*, and revive the “real face of Port Said”, which is related to the sea, the canal and the resistance, as he believes.

Chapter 4:

Remaking the City After the Port Said Stadium Massacre

“February 1st, 2012 is a significant date in my life. Suddenly, being a Port-Saidian turned out to be an insult, after it was my source of pride”. The previous words described how *Essam* remembered the Port Said Stadium Massacre. The massacre was the most catastrophic accident in the Egyptian sports history, in which clashes between fans of *Al Masry* (the Port Saidian sports club) and *Al Ahly* football teams unleashed in Port Said Stadium after one of the Egyptian League matches. 72 individuals were killed and hundreds were injured, all of whom were members of Ultras Ahlawy, the biggest fan group of *Al Ahly* team. The clashes were preceded by several skirmishes between the two fans groups, as part of the contestation between the football teams. That incident was unprecedented, however, not only in the number of victims, but also in its consequences. *Al Ahly* fans accused both the security forces and Green Eagles, one of the fan groups of *Al Masry*, of organizing and conducting this massacre against Ultras Ahlawy members, as a result of the latter’s participation in the events of 2011 revolution. Other political revolutionary groups shared the same point of view with *Al Ahly* fans, accusing the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), the ruler of the country during the post-revolution period, of organizing this massacre against Ultras Ahlawy. The massacre took place a year after the toppling of Mubarak’s regime. During this same year, the police and military repeatedly used deadly force to suppress massive demonstrations calling for change, leading to the death and injury of protesters, which made it more convincing to

accuse SCAF of being responsible for the massacre - especially given that members of Ultras Ahlawy were always part of the protesting groups against police and military brutality. It was a moment of shock across the whole country, with an absolute sympathy toward Ultras Ahlawy members. The police director of Port Said and the governor of the city resigned, the national football league was suspended, and clashes between *Al Ahly* fans and police troops lasted for almost a week in the premises of the headquarter of the Ministry of Interior in Cairo. That said, however, the hardest part for the Port-Saidians was the stigma they forcibly acquired since then.

Essam, with whom I started this chapter, was studying architecture in Cairo. He is a basketball player, and a socially popular person. He was born and raised in Port Said. He did not face hard time orienting himself among his colleagues in the architecture school in Cairo, however. *Essam* was always popular among his colleagues, just until the massacre, when a radical change happened in the way people dealt with him. He was blamed for the massacre, just because he was Port-Saidian, as he told me. Some of his colleagues stopped talking to him. Others were dealing with him brusquely. "I did not understand this attitude from people who knew me!" *Essam* remembered. He was surprised by the tendency to accuse every Port-Saidian of being responsible for the massacre. "Actually, there were a lot of sympathetic Port-Saidians with *Al Ahly* fans", *Essam* added. He had hard time following the media coverage that was totally aggressive toward Port Said and Port-Saidians, especially sports media. *Essam* remembered when "a player from *Al Ahly* football team insulted all of the Port-Saidians on his Facebook page by saying that they were cowards when they fled their city during the war".

Essam was verbally harassed by one of the teaching assistants in the university, which resulted in an altercation between them in the classroom. For Essam, the issue was how to convince people that “Port Said is not merely the massacre”. However, he did not find the answer at that time yet he kept searching for something to be done.

I was told a similar story by Haitham Al Ashry, the founder of *Sohbah* band, one of the new *Simsimyah* bands established in Port Said after the 2011 revolution. After the massacre in 2012, he was invited with *al tanbourah* band to participate in *Al Fan Midan*, “Art is the Square”, conventions which was a monthly cultural event that started after the January 2011 uprising until 2013. It was organized by several cultural groups and initiatives, with the main idea of organizing a musical event in one of the main squares of Cairo. Later, the event took place in different cities at the same time every month, until the security forces started to obstruct the event. This was after toppling the regime of the Muslim Brotherhood in July 2013, followed by several acts to control the public sphere. Going back to Al Ashry, he remembered the moment when *al tanbourah* was introduced by the organizers of *Al Fan Midan*. There was a storm of disapproval among the audience, which came mainly from the corner where a group of *Al Ahly* fans gathered, as he remembered. They were shouting and asking the band to leave the stage. However, the band started to sing and the performance was outstanding. *Al Ashry* remembered that the audience praised them enthusiastically at the end of the concert, which convinced him that art can make a difference. It can convince people that “Port Said is not merely the massacre”. The same

phrase, albeit articulated differently, was communicated by both Essam and Al Ashry.

The stadium massacre produced a situation in which most of the young people of Port Said felt that they were attacked and stigmatized by referring to them as “thugs”, “perpetrators” and “criminals”. I was told by a Port Saidian friend that there was a rumor proliferating in Port Said that people in Cairo might attack any Port Saidian car, if they noticed its licence plate of the FTZ. Regardless of the truth of the rumor, it showed how deep effect of the massacre was on enforcing the stigma of “thugs” and “perpetrators”. The stigma was an act of othering the Port Saidians and as a reaction, they started to “other” those who were othering them. I experienced this in February 2013 when I visited the city for the first time. As a journalist, I was covering the massive protests against the death penalties that were issued, on 26th January 2013, against the Port-Saidian defendants in the stadium massacre. Police troops opened fire at the families and supporters of the defendants, which led to another massacre among the protesters who gathered in a spot close to Port Said prison. The defendants were perceived as innocents who were sacrificed to satisfy *Al Ahly* fans. During my visit, I met a lot of angry people who described the trial as unjust. They thought that the government attempted to satisfy *Al Ahly* fans because they are numerous. During the year between the two massacres of the stadium and the prison, Ultras Ahlawy managed to organize huge protests in Cairo, where the biggest number of its members existed. Indeed, *Al Ahly* fans protests were capable of paralyzing Cairo at that time which complicated the situation more for the Port-Saidians who started to interpret the death penalties as a matter of

compromise from the government, “which does not care about anything except the people of the center, Cairo”. During my visit to Port Said at that time, walking with my camera, I was easily noticed. I was repeatedly stopped by people in the streets and suspiciously asked about what I was doing there, and for which media outlet I was working. For example, a young protester once accused me of defaming the protesters by portraying them as thugs and perpetrators. Several times, the protesters forced TV crews to leave the area, for the lack of trust in any media channels from Cairo. There was a public mode of suspicion and stimulation against everyone and everything that represented “the others” who are associated with the act of othering the Port-Saidian people. It took a huge effort from me to contain and control my temper.

For more than a month after the death penalties against the Port Saidian defendants, the city rose up against the authorities. The protesters flooded the streets of Port Said. On the day after the prison massacre, dozens of thousands of citizens participated in the funeral of the victims. The police troops attacked the funeral, an act that maximized the rage of the Port Saidians. The clashes continued in the city for three days. The number of the casualties reached 46 protestors. Ismailia and Suez started to protest against the massacre in Port Said. Hence, the Islamist President Mohamed Morsi declared the state of emergency and enforced a night curfew in the three cities of the Canal, threatening those who attempted to “spread chaos”. However, the protesters in Port Said, as well as Ismailia and Suez, challenged the curfew and the state of emergency by organizing not only night protests in the first hours of the curfew but also football matches as a way of mocking the

presidential decree. Further, the Port Saidian protesters started a sit-in in *al shohadaa* square (the martyrs square) in front of the of the governorate administration building and the Police directory. The city developed a complete state of rebellion by calling for a civil disorder. For weeks, marches were organized every day, wandering across the whole city. Every morning, the protesters gathered in front of the main gate of the industrial area, blocking the road to prevent the workers buses from entering the factories. The march then began walking down *Mohamed Ali* street until *al shohadaa square*, while pausing in front of each school and government institution, asking the people to join them, or at least showing solidarity with the strike. I remember one of the days of the strike, when the march passed by the headquarter of the electricity company, the employees went outside the building with a sign indicating that they support the Port Saidian strike. It was the employees' way to apologize for the protesters that they were not able to leave their offices at that time. That said, however, the march included a lot of signs that carried the names of institutions, companies, trade unions, and syndicates supporting the strike.

With the declaration of the state of emergency, the military was demanded to restore order in the three cities of the Canal. However, it became obvious that the military did not want to put itself explicitly in front of the people. The military was taking a step back from aligning itself with the Muslim Brotherhood regime. The police troops disappeared from Port Said. They hid inside their headquarters, while people were re-appropriating the streets. Graffiti and photos of the faces of the prison massacre martyrs were everywhere in Port Said. In the sit-in, the protesters established the "people's

police station” where people can symbolically file reports against the political regime figures. It was a marquee in Mohamed Ali street. In the entrance, the protesters hanged a sign titled “the state of Port Said - the Police Station of Mohamed Ali Street - the people in serves of the people”, inverting the slogan of the Egyptian police, “the police in service of the people”. Inside the symbolic police station, the protesters hung a list of the names of those wanted for justice people including Mohamed Morsi, Khairat Al Shater, Mohamed Badie, and Mohamed Al Beltagi, all of whom were Muslim Brotherhood politicians and leaders. During the strike, people recalled the memories of resistance against the tripartite aggression in 1956. One particular sign in the sit-in emphasised this link: “Port Said fought the tripartite aggression, and it will fight the Muslim Brotherhood”. *Simsmyah* bands, including *al tanbourah*, produced new songs about the Prison Massacre and the resistance of the Port-Saidian people, as what was happening during the 1956 war while *al tanbourah* and other bands participated in the sit-in. Drawing on Benjamin (1969a), the Port-Saidians were recalling specific fragments of history to disrupt the present. By recalling the history of resistance during the tripartite aggression while protesting the police brutality, the protesters were making a parallelism between the two moments, fighting back the stigma that followed them after the stadium massacre. The city was rendered again as the rebellious city, but this time against suppression and marginalization. During my conversations with people in the sit-in, there was a deep sense of being marginalized, attributed to the economic recession after the reduction of the import quota in the FTZ, and also to the stigma following Port Said and its people after the stadium massacre.

The attempt to convince people that “Port Said is not merely the massacre” posed another question of what is Port Said. For *Al Ashry*, the answer was found in *Simsimyah*. As he told me, he focused on studying *Simsimyah*, improving his skills, connecting himself more with other young *Simsimyah* musicians and singers. Before that moment, he was taking *Simsimyah* as a hobby. His main focus had been on his study and work as medical lab technician in a private hospital. However, after the incident of *Al Fan Midan*, he started to regard *Simsimyah* as something important for himself and the city, without knowing exactly what this thing could be, or at least without being able to articulate it during our conversation. One day during the summer of 2015, *Al Ashry*’s friend was enrolled in the military conscription. Hence, *Al Ashry* with other friends decided to organize a *Simsimyah* farewell party for this friend in one of the cafes on the shore of the sea. Although they were singing for their friend without sound system or proper equipments, people in the cafe dealt with them as if they were a band. Some members of the audience filmed videos and uploaded them online, describing them as a new *Simsimyah* band. People accordingly started to deal with them as a new band, although *Al Ashry* and his friends did not intend to be so. After that incident, however, they began to consider singing for the public by organizing concerts in the same cafe, with the owner of the cafe welcoming them. They called themselves *Sohbah* band, Friendship band, a name capturing their very basic idea of themselves as just friends singing for themselves. The cafe shared the profit of the *Simsimyah* nights with the band. Hence, they used this money to purchase more equipment and uniform. They kept this non-commercial outlook until now. They use the profit

merely to improve the music and the appearance of their band. The regularity of the concerts, every Friday on Jasmine cafe, accelerated the band's popularity. I attended one of their nights in September 2016. It was the first anniversary of the band. I was surprised by the number of middle class families who attended the event. People were praising them as the new generation of *Simsimyah* singers and musicians who would keep this part of the history of the city alive.

For *Essam*, answering the question of what is Port Said took a different path. As an architect, he was interested in the architectural heritage of the city. Between 2012 and 2014, he started to collect more information about the unknown buildings of Port Said, such as the "International Hotel" which was the first hotel in the city, the old lighthouse, Casa d'Italia (the Italian House), the guest house of Empress Eugenie, etc. He gathered his friends from Ramsis Club in the playground of basketball, and started to ask them about these buildings to raise their curiosity. "I realized that half of the Port-Saidians walk in the streets while looking only under their feet. They do not see the buildings in front of them", *Essam* explained. He succeeded in raising his friend's curiosity toward these buildings and their histories. Hence, he organized several walks to visit these buildings, sharing what he knew about their histories. After the walks, they created a Facebook group to discuss what they wanted to do. The idea was to help people see these buildings. "The dream that captured us was to reopen the old cinema houses, renovate Casa d'Italia, make the streets clean again, protect the buildings with unique architecture from being demolished, in general to reinstate Port Said as it

was” Essam stated. They named their group *Port Said ‘ala Qademoh*, (Port Said as it was).

When I asked *Essam* about the reason behind this interest in architectural heritage, he replied that Port Said has a distinctive architectural style, which can be attractive for any visitor. “This uniqueness and distinctiveness of architecture can make the city function again”, Essam explained, referring to the recessive economic situation of the city. He is trying to suggest an approach that makes the heritage profitable by renovating and reusing old places. He hopes that this approach will reinstate tourism in Port Said. His group has a project of renovating Casa d’Italia, and turning it into a cultural center, where events can take place. He believes that by turning places like Casa d’Italia into a cultural center, visitors from close cities such as Ismailia, Suez, and Damietta will be attracted to Port Said and to attending events there. Hence, restaurants, cafes and hotels around renovated places will benefit from this audience. In that way, he was trying to interweave the heritage work with the normal lives of the people of the city, linking abstract notions such as “heritage” and “culture” to people’s everyday. He tested this approach, when he organized a trip to Port Said for 80 students of his university colleagues from Cairo. He prepared a walk in the city, a *Simsimyah* concert, a lunch in a famous fish restaurant, and a deal with some clothes stores to give the visitors discount vouchers to buy clothes from these stores. For him, the most successful part of this trip was when he got positive feedback from his colleagues about Port Said, especially that the trip happened two years after the stadium massacre. “My main aim was to

change the bad idea of my colleagues about Port Said, to convince them that it is not merely the massacre. And, I succeeded in this”, Essam explained.

Port Said 'ala Qademoh walks were repeated several times. With each time adding more buildings, stops and narratives to the walks, more and more intricately fusing time and space. Walking through the space turned to be also walking through time and the different historical phases of the making of the city. With time, more people, mainly students, joined the group which now reached 150 members. In the spring festival, they organize a week of walks and an exhibition of old pictures of Port Said. The exhibition takes place before *Al Wasefyah*, one of the oldest schools in Port Said usually frequently visited. I attended the exhibition in 2017. I stayed there for almost an hour, observing the interactions of dozens of people who visited the exhibition with the old pictures of the city. I noticed that most of the younger generations were asking questions about the histories of the places, what happened to them, and how they changed through time, while the older generations were sharing their memories and stories about the same places. I talked with a man in his eighties from a middle class background. He was talking about how clean, organized and beautiful the city used to be in the past. In general, he perceived the past of Port Said as more cultured, cosmopolitan, and civilized with the variety of cinemas, theaters, and communities, when compared to the present of the city. The same nostalgic rhetoric was common among the older people who participated the exhibition.

In 2016, The group succeeded in making a deal with the owner of Rio cinema house in *Al Gomhuria* street in the heart of *al i'frang* neighborhood to renovate the lounge of the cinema, and reuse it for art events. *Port Said 'ala*

Qademoh financed the renovation costs, and they now use the cinema for film screenings and music concerts, after it was abandoned for years. The group has another project of renovating Casa d'Italia, which was built in 1930s by the Italian fascist government at that time. The front of the building still carries one of Mussolini's quotes. It is believed that the building was established initially to be the residence of the future Italian ruler after controlling North Africa. However, the building was closed after the second world war until now, with the exception of few years during the 1980s when it was turned into a theater and cinema for short time before it was closed again. *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* contacted the Italian consulate, proposing to reopen the building, and using it as a cultural center. However, the consulate refused, because they cannot reopen the building with the Mussolini's quote on its front. They also mentioned that the building is ramshackle and cannot be used. Later, the consulate offered the building for sale. Yet, *Port Said Qala Qademoh* still talk about the building and their project in every event they organize.

When I asked *Seif*, one of the organizers of *Port Said Qala Qademoh's* events, about the reasons behind the exclusion of other places, such as *al arab* neighbourhood, from their walks for a second, it seemed like he did not think of this matter before I asked him. However, he answered by saying that most of the heritage buildings are in *al i'frang* and most of the distinctive heritage buildings in *al arab* were replaced with new buildings which are similar to other buildings in Egypt. For him, *al arab* is more commercial to be included in the walks they organize. After seconds of silence, he added that "he still believes that *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* has to make more efforts to integrate *al arab* in its walks and activities". The first part of *Seif's* answer

highlights what is perceived as heritage and what is not, revealing a specific perception toward Port Said and what defines it and its heritage. The concept of heritage itself is not neutral, but is rather constructed through processes of abstraction and fetishization of spaces. Drawing on Marx's (1977) explanation of the fetishization of commodity, Lefebvre (1991) argued that capitalism also fetishizes space. It renders space into mere abstraction, detaching it from the labor force and the social relations that produced it in the first place. *Al i'frang* was built as the European facade of the city, hiding *al arab* neighborhood as the undesirable part that needs to be concealed. Focusing on *al i'frang* as the real face of Port Said - which needs to be protected, preserved, and reserved - works on the same perception. It conceals the spatial and social antagonism between *al i'frang* and *al arab*, favoring the colonial architecture of the former.

The argument here is not about the ethicality of focusing on *al i'frang*, while neglecting *al arab*. It is more about unpacking the abstractions that control the imagination and the process of reproducing spaces. The act of walking around the city and narrating the history of its places is in itself an act of reproducing space and history and thus cannot be neutral. As it was emphasized by Benjamin (1968), history is not the homogenous and empty time that historicism preaches about. On the contrary, it is the rupture that can disrupt the now-time. Also, space is not neutral; it is produced. Both history and space are loaded with social relations and antagonisms which produce them. These antagonisms may be be concealed through abstraction and fetishization processes. However, this will not make these antagonisms disappear. This was the main argument in Gordillo's (2014) work on rubble and ruins. The former signifies the debris of the past that disrupt the present

time, while the latter signifies the rubble after fetishizing it, turning it into something belongs only to the past, detached from the present time, a mere heritage. The process of turning rubble to ruin is the act of concealing the antagonisms which produced this rubble in the first place. In the case of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh*, the project is still developing. It is still early to analyze its approach as mere rendering city into ruins, especially that slight differences in their approach are taking place, as will now be explained.

In January 2016, I participated in a workshop in Port Said about the different approaches to read and reconstruct history. The workshop was organized by the history scholar Alia Mossallam, who dedicated part of her PHD dissertation for Port Said during the Suez Crisis. In her work, Mossallam was interested in studying the history of the Nasserist period, relying on oral history and popular songs. *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* was one of the local partners which helped with organizing and hosting the workshop. One of the sessions was on how to read the history of the city by following its spatial transformations. It was organized and moderated by Yahia Shawkat, an urbanist scholar. He prepared a tour in the city yet Shawkat's tour was totally different than the walks of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh*. It integrated parts of the city which were never integrated in their walks. Seif himself acknowledged that he did not visit these places or thought of them as parts of "the identity of Port Said" before the workshop. The tour started from *al i'frang*, crosscut *al arab*, *al manakh*, *al zohour* neighborhoods till we reached the shantytown on the shore of *al manzalah* lake. All of these places were telling fragments of the story of the city which sounded totally different from the story that *al i'frang* was telling. The workshop impacted *Seif* and *Essam* who also attended it.

When I attended the spring festival exhibition of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* in April 2017, I found that they added a banner of pictures of figures who were members in the resistance during 1956 war, with short biographies of them. Beside this banner, there was another one with lyrics of *Simsimyah* songs and the events in which they were written and sung. Further, I was told by *Seif* that in October 2016, *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* was part of *mahtat* event (stations). The event was taking place in three cities simultaneously, Port Said one of which. The concept of the event was to organize outdoor and interactive audio and visual performances in these cities. As part of the activities of the event, *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* chose a building in *al arab* neighborhood this time to be part of the event. The building was like a theater for the audio/visual performance, using lights and music to highlight the building while a performer started to narrate the story of *al arab* neighborhood. The audience were walkers in the street, dwellers in their houses, and people in the cafes. *Seif* mentioned that this was the first time for them to organize an activity in *al arab* and that it made them think that they have to do more of this. It is true that the colonial narrative of Port Said is still dominating *Port Said 'ala Qademoh's* work, but some traces of other narratives have started to unfold. Yet, assembling different narratives and putting them in one place does not mean that the narrative of the city is now more inclusive. What is rather needed is a political stance to narrate the story of the city based on the social and spatial antagonisms between its groups and neighborhoods.

There is a arguably a link between *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* and *sohbah* band as well as *Simsimyah* bands that makes their work crucial: the claim to the right to the public spaces of Port Said. *Sohbah* band, just like

other *Simsimyah* bands, performs regularly in public spaces. *Sohbah* started in one of the cafes, then moved to another on the shore of the sea. *Sawt al Salam* band plays in Saad Zaghoul public garden in *al arab* neighbourhood. *Al tanbourah* plays in *al nigmah* cafe. *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* walks are public activities which take place in the streets of the city. The existence of these activities in the public spaces allows for a sense of communal ownership to the spaces of the city, even if these public spaces were merely occupied by cultural and artistic events, since this does not negate the fact that consuming public spaces is one of the ways to define who owns the city and reproduces it. Despite the problematic approach of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* to deal with the concept of the “heritage”, their walks still contribute to the making of the city by claiming the right to “walk” and the right to reuse the old buildings. Posing this idea of reusing the spaces of the city in itself changes the relationship with the city, reinforcing a sense of ownership and belonging.

Conclusions and Reflections

“Memories tie us to that place... It’s personal, not interesting to anyone else, but after all that’s what gives a neighborhood its character”.

de Certeau (1984, p.108)

In my thesis, I attempted to follow the different ways in which the social of Port Said has been assembled, and the spaces of the city have been produced through the practices of the dwellers and the state. I focused on the processes of the making of the people and the city in specific moments. I focused on *al tahgeer* (the forced migration that followed the outbreak of the 1967 war, and remained until 1974); the declaration of the free trade zone in the mid-1970s; and the massacre of Port Said stadium in 2012. Yet, I did not choose these moments at the beginning of my fieldwork. They appeared to me as pivotal moments while I was conducting my field work. They were pivotal because in each one of them, different actors emerged , different groups were formed, and spaces were produced. They were fragments through which the history of Port Said could be narrated, not as it happened, but as it was experienced.

During *al tahgeer*, the evacuation of Port Said threatened Port-Saidians by alienating them from the forms of existence they used to define their lives through, such as dwelling, working, and socialization. Being away from the space which allowed these forms of existence - and simultaneously was produced through them - ushered the process of reimagining Port Said as developed, modernized, and open to the world in comparison to the host

communities which were rendered as rural, primitive, and parochial. *Simsimyah*, as an actor, played a major role in forging this imaginary about Port Said during *al tahgeer*. The *Simsimyah* gatherings were nodes of reproducing the Port-Saidians as a group, while they were away from their city. The migration documents were other actors which produced *al mohaggaren* (the evacuees) as legal subjects. Later, these documents were used as a proof of the Port-Saidiness against *al a'ghrab*.

The declaration of the free trade zone (FTZ) shifted the modality of trading in Port Said, from sea trading to land trading. It allowed new actors such as smugglers, holders of importing permits, middlemen, street vendors and local visitors to emerge, transforming the landscape of the city. The trading hub moved from *al i'frang* to *al arab* neighborhood. The mobility of the ships, goods, gifts, and foreign visitors were replaced with the confinement of the imported commodities within the borders of the Free Trade Zone. Trading shifted from being a way to communicate with the world to a confined affair to the local. Also, it can be argued that the city was rendered as the symbol of *infatih* (the open door policy), after being the icon of the resistance during the tripartite aggression in 1956.

After the decay of the Free Trade Zone, a sense of disorientation haunted both sea and land traders. Commercial streets in *al arab* neighborhood turned to be an open museum of the devastated lives of the traders. The prison massacre affected the people of the city deeply. It rendered them as “thugs” and “perpetrators”, posing the question of “what is

Port Said beyond the Massacre?”. The answer came in the form of new practices to reproduce the city in a different way from how it was portrayed in the wake of the massacre. Through different practices, different fragments of the past are recalled to reinvent the city as the icon of resistance, or the city that has unique architecture and a cosmopolitan past, or a city that has a distinctive musical heritage. Through the walks of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* (Port Said as it was) group and the concerts of new *Simsimyah* bands in public spaces, a sense of belonging to Port Said is developed, and claims to the spaces of the city are made. However, both forms of practices engage with the past, which is rendered as heritage, in an ambiguous way. On one hand, *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* and new *Simsimyah* bands fetishize the past of the city, while, on the other hand, they use this past to claim the right to the city and its spaces.

The reinvention of Port Said did not stop. In the last two years, President Sisi announced the beginning to build a series of projects in the East of Port Said: a new port, a mega industrial zone, and a new city which will host 50,000 people . These projects are part of the government plan to “develop the Suez Canal Zone”. They raise more questions about the effects of these projects on Port Said. Will we see a new wave of migration to Port Said similar to that of the nineteenth century? In which way will these new spaces be ordered? What will the relationship be between the new Port Said and the old one? If Port Said was part of building modern Egypt, what will the role of the new Port Said be? All of these questions can lead to further

research projects to understand not only what is happening in Port Said now but also what is happening in Egypt generally.

Through this journey, Port Said was not produced merely by the State or the Capital plans. Rather, the networks of actors always went beyond these two influential and hegemonic entities. The people of Port Said were always actors themselves, also playing a part in the reinventions of the city. However, there was always this question about how to theorize concepts such as the State or the Capital through a conceptual framework that relies on the Actor Network Theory-- a question that was not fully addressed in this research. Yet, as a quick reflection that can open up possibilities for further research, I suggest that, for instance, the State can also be theorized as a group of actors who work together in a specific way in order to sustain the group's domination or to maintain a specific order. We can follow the same paradigm of the Actor Network Theory to understand state formation and transformation as processes involving a group, or even various groups of actors rather than one solidified entity. What makes this assumption possible is the fact that each time I was asking one of my interlocutors about the state and how it was transformed with time, the answer was always vague and unclear. However, with the flow of the interview, the same interlocutor was always able to say specific details about state practices, and their effects on his life and the city. For instance, the migration documents, the importing permits and the customs officers are all actors, that affected the lives of the Port-Saidians, and they belong to the realm of the state; they form a diffused network of actors which influence other groups of actors.

What makes a city interesting is the fact that it is the most intimate space where we practice our existence. The city is what we have, what we produce, and what makes us. In my thesis, I attempted to situate this intimacy as the cornerstone through which I attempt to understand how the spaces of the cities are developed, and how lives are produced. It was an attempt to read Port Said from below, instead of reading it from atop, knowing that it is a messy process of collecting and ordering fragments; yet from within the messiness is also a way to develop alternative knowledge and politics about cities.

Biographies²²

Aziz:

He was born in 1957. His parents were Port-Saidians by birth. Yet, his grandparents were immigrants from different places in Egypt. He is from a middle class family. Both of his parents were employees in the telecommunication central station of Port Said. He is a senior mechanical engineer in Port Said governorate. He lived through the 1967 war, was relocated with his family to *Sherbin* city in *Al Daqahlia* governorate, then to Damietta city in north Delta during *al tahgeer*. Despite the fact that his family's life conditions during *al tahgeer* was better than other families, they returned to Port Said just after the 1973 war to proceed with their lives there.

Hajj Rizq:

He was born in 1950. His father was a *bambouty* and his grandfather was a worker in the Suez Canal Company. Most of His family members are merchants. He did not proceed with his education after middle school, preferring to work in his family's shops rather than being an employee. He experienced trading before and after *al tahgeer*. So, he is an expert in both modalities of trading in Port Said. He lived with his family in *al i'frang* neighborhood when he was a child, then they moved to *al manakh* after the destruction of their house during the tripartite aggression in 1956. During *al tahgeer*, he was relocated with his family to *Biyala* city in *Kafr al-Sheikh* governorate (in the Nile Delta), then to Alexandria until they got back to Port

²² I changed the names of my interlocutors, following the Institutional Review Board rules.

Said after the 1973 war. Now, he owns and runs two textile shops in *al arab* neighborhood.

Ismail:

He is the son of Hajj Rizq, and was born in 1984. Although he started his professional life early by working in his family business, now he is a worker in a petrochemical factory in Port Said- a job that he does not like a lot. He still prefers to work in trading as he used to during his early years. However, after the recession that followed the 2011 revolution, he needed to accept this stable job in the factory. He lives in his grandmother's house in *al arab* neighborhood.

Abbas:

He was born in 1932. He is a retired artisan in the Suez Canal Authority. Yet, he is well known as one of the prominent *Simsimyah* poets in Port Said. His parents were born in Port Said, but his grandparents were immigrants from *Fayoum*. He is from a working class family. Most of his male family members, including his father, were workers in the Suez Canal Company. He did not proceed with his education after primary school. Then, he worked for a furniture workshop until he was hired in the Suez Canal Authority in 1963. He started to write his poems in 1956, during the tripartite war. During *al tahgeer*, he chose to be one of *al mostabqeen*, the people who remained in the city to serve the military during the war. He was a member of the paramilitary troops (the civil guards) between 1967 and 1973. During this period, he established a *Simsimyah* band, *Shabab al Nasr* (the Youth of Victory). With his *Simsimyah*

band, he sung for the soldiers and *al mostabqeen* in Port Said during the war, and wandered to the Delta to sing for *al mohaggaren* (the evacuees) during *al tahgeer*. He has lived his whole life in *al arab* neighborhood.

Gad:

He was born in 1946. His father was born in Port Said. He vaguely remembered that his grandfather migrated from Upper Egypt without being able to remember from which city. His father was a *bambouty*. Before the 1967 war, he used to work for a Fish Supply Company. After the war, he was relocated to *Zefta* city in *Al Gharbia* Governorate, and then moved to *Talkha* City with his family members, who were relocated to at the beginning in *Al Menoufia* governorate. He managed to buy frozen fish from Damietta and Mansoura, selling them in *Zefta* and *Talkha* to earn his living. He kept visiting Port Said during *al tahgeer*, until he was able to return to the city after the 1973 war. Now, he and his sons own and run a fish restaurant in *al arab* neighborhood where he has lived his whole life in the same house.

Hashim:

He was born in 1957. His father was born in Port Said. His grandfather migrated from Giza to Port Said. Hashim is a *bambouty*, from a family that used to practice this profession. His brothers, father, uncles, and grandfather were *bamboutyah*. He legally inherited the *bambouty* license from his father, and practiced the job for decades. He was the head of the Sea Traders Association until 2012. He traveled abroad to various European countries to import goods and sell them in Port Said, relying on his relationships with

Captains and sailors he met during his life. Now, he stopped working as a *bambouty*, preferring to help his son in running his textile shop in *al arab* neighborhood, traveling every month to Turkey to import more fabric. He lives in *al arab* neighborhood.

Al qobtan:

He was born in 1944. He does not remember his family roots, yet he suggested that they were from Damietta. His father owned a small boat. He was leasing it to *bamboutyah* or shipping agencies. The rest of his family members were working in the harbor. He was a boatman in one of the companies of the Suez Canal Authority. His task was to reach ships with technical problems in the middle of the Canal, allowing a team of technicians to help them. Secretly, he was also a *bambouty*, selling commodities to sailors or exchanging goods with them, on ships, while they were crossing the canal or docking at the harbor. Working as a *bambouty* was not illegal, however, he was not allowed to do so, according to the regulations that were enforced by the Suez Canal Authority on its employees. He lived most of his life in *al arab* neighborhood. After his retirement, he managed to have an apartment in one of the Suez Canal Authority housing projects for its employees in Port Fouad.

Abo Nader:

He was born in 1956. His father is a Port Saidian, and his grandfather was an immigrant from *Al Daqahlia* governorate. Abo Nader was raised in a musical family, where all of his uncles were musicians in *Simsimyah* bands. So, he learned to play and sing *Simsimyah* songs in his early years. After *al tahgeer*,

he joined different bands, which proliferated during the 1970s. He was trying to learn from each band a new thing. Later, he joined *al tanbourah* (the famous *Simsimyah* band now) in 1986, and kept playing and singing with its members until 2010, when he left the band and established a new one, *Sawt al Karawan*. Alongside his life as a *Simsimyah* musician and singer, he is an employee in the Suez Canal Authority since the mid-1980s.

Bahgat:

He was born in 1966. His grandfather came from Giza. And, his father was born in Port Said. Bahgat is from a working class family. Before *al tahgeer*, His father was working for an Agricultural Supplies Company. During *al tahgeer*, Bahgat's family was relocated to *Badawyah* village, which was close to Mansoura city, then to *Al Kordy* in *Al Daqahlia* governorate, and later to Alexandria. After the 1973 war, Bahgat's family returned to Port Said. And his father worked, first, for an importing company, and then he opened his own shoe-making workshop in *al arab* neighborhood where the family lived. Bahgat was educated in a technical school to be a carpenter. He owns his own workshop now. He is also well known as a *Simsimyah* maker. He does not play *Simsimyah*. However, he was a singer in *al tanbourah* and *Sawt al Karawan* bands.

Essam:

He was born in 1994 and studied marine engineering in the Suez Canal University. He is one of the cofounders of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* (Port Said

as it was) group. The latter is a local initiative which works on preserving the architectural heritage of Port Said.

Seif:

He was born in 1993, and studied architecture in Shoubra Faculty of Engineering in Cairo. He is one of the founders of *Port Said 'ala Qademoh* (Port Said as it was) group. The latter is a local initiative works on preserving the architectural heritage of Port Said.

Haitham Al Ashry:

He was born in 1992. He was raised in an artistic family. His father and grandfather were two prominent *Simsimyah* singers and musicians. Haitham was trained to be a *Simsimyah* musician in *Al tanboura* band. In 2015, he founded his own band, *Sohbah* (friendship band).

Al Rayes Younes:

He was born in 1952. His relationship with *Simsimyah* started in his early years as a fan. After the 1967 war, he was relocated to *al Senbellawein* city in *Al Daqahliah* governorate. To cope with the tough years of *al tahgeer*, he joined the immigrants *Simsimyah* band in *al Senbellawein* city. In 1970, he moved to Cairo to join the university. He stayed in Cairo for a decade, where he turned to political activism in the Communist Labor Party. In 1980, he returned to Port Said, to find that the city looked totally different than how he used to know it before *al tahgeer*. Most of the famous *Simsimyah* singers and musicians were retired. He spent 8 years in search of the retired *Simsimyah*

singers and musicians. In 1988, he established *Al tanboura* band to revive the art of *Simsimyah*. He lives now between Cairo and Port Said and still manages *al tanboura*.

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