Revised Prospectus

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Research Question

For this research project, I aim to analyze the ways in which the structure and activity of non-state actors, primarily non-governmental organizations, affect the the performance of identity among Cairo's urban refugee populations. This will entail looking at the commoditization of social and cultural norms, in addition to the role of discourse in shaping performed identity. Simply stated, I aim to answer the following question: **How do non-state organizations affect the performed identity of refugees through both their presence and their actions and words?**

Many academics have previously examined the performance of "refugee-ness" of foreign immigrants in Cairo usually with regards to the UNHCR, specifically focusing on the context of the organization's role in assigning "refugee status" to immigrants to Cairo. In order to be approved for "refugee status", with which comes some monetary and medical aid, refugees in Cairo exaggerate aspects of their personal plights in order to be considered as a "refugee", rather than an "economic migrant" or simply an "immigrant". By assigning the status of individual refugees, the UNHCR not only shapes the self-identification of refugees through designating this title, but also through indirectly providing economic and social incentives to these immigrants to "perform" aspects of their identity differently than they may have done otherwise.

I aim to add to this body of literature by examining *Safarni*, an organization in Cairo that specializes in children's' educational workshops on racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Through

dissecting my field notes written while I was a volunteer with the organization as well as through completing a discursive analysis of surveys conducted by the organization, I will answer my research question by linking the themes in *Safarni's* work and role in Cairene society to previous academic studies on the role of non-state organizations in shaping refugee identity as well as to two theoretical frameworks discussed directly below.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This paper aims to address two large threads of international relations theory and the relationship between them by using the specifics of the case study of *Safarni*, which I will argue serves as a valid example in both threads of theory.

The first theoretical framework that I aim to use to guide my analysis of *Safarni*'s work is that of the moral philosophy of the political economy. Within this thread of theory, I aim to keep in mind questions such as, "What does it mean to buy and sell identity and cultural norms within the free market of the NGO sphere in Cairo?" and "To what extent can we think of the *Safarni* volunteers and the local participants as actors in a type of market, and what does that mean for defining the content of *Safarni* workshops?". This thread of theory will help me define the role of *Safarni* as an actor within a community, and help me conceptualize the role of the organization as an international actor within a poor, Cairene neighborhood.

Within this thread, I am most heavily influenced by Julia Elyachar's work in her book, *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo*. Elyachar also refers to other scholars the work of whom I will also use in my research. Of these authors, I intend on using analysis of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* for a classically liberal view of the international economy, Timothy Mitchell's *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics,*

Modernity, and James Ferguson's *The Anti-politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho.*

The second thread of theory that I aim to use to guide my analysis of *Safarni's* work is that of the sociological performance of identity. An example of the questions within this thread that will guide my analysis of *Safarni's* work is: "To what extent are refugee identities shaped by diaspora, and how do these identities change due to economic, political, and social incentives?". This second theoretical framework will allow me to analyze the efficacy and implications of *Safarni's* content, enabling me to look on a micro scale at the role that this NGO plays in affecting refugee identity.

There are several scholars who I will be looking to in this section of my analysis. First, I will be using the iconic work by Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in thinking about the performance of identity. Michael Taussig's *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* will also play a formative role in shaping my analysis of *Safarni's* content.

Less central in my analysis, though still vital, will be thinking about the role of race and post-colonial relations in thinking about these two frameworks. For example, is it important that the founder and president of this organization is an American? Since the organizations deals with affecting the children's discourse on race and diversity, such questions are important when dissecting the role and efficacy of the organization. Influential works that I will be using as reference on this topic will be Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject*, Edward Said's *Orientalism,* and Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract*.

Background Information

In this section, I will outline the organization *Safarni,* its work in Cairo, its goals, and why studying this specific organization is useful in linking together ideas on the political economy and the performative nature of identity in the context of urban refugees in Cairo. *Safarni* is a non-governmental organization founded by an American living in Cairo. The organization operates in low-income neighborhoods in Cairo, offering workshops focused on spreading awareness of "diversity" to the children of these neighborhoods. Each workshop consists of once-a-week meetings, each lasting 3 hours, for 8-9 weeks. Once the children graduate from the program, their families are compensated with a "gift" of oil, flour, and sugar.

The goal of the organization is as follows:

"Safarni designs and implements intercultural programs that engage children to explore and appreciate diversity in all its forms. Programs create a platform for emotional and critical engagement with human difference, wherein children discover and immerse themselves in cultures from around the world without ever leaving their neighborhoods, and learn to see their own neighborhoods through new eyes."[1]

To this end, *Safarni* implements cultural workshops each week for the children, with each session focusing on a different culture and a different social issue associated with that culture's country. For example, during the workshop on the United States, children learn about American

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[1] https://safarni.org/about-us/

wedding traditions, make peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches, and watch videos on and problem-solve racism against African Americans in the United States. Learning about these cultural aspects and social issues is supposed to decrease the mental barrier between these Egyptian children and foreigners, and allow the children to compare between such social issues in their own societies and those that they study through the course of the workshop.

Studying *Safarni* is a particularly suitable for studying the relationship between the political economy and the performative nature of identity because of both the organization's role as a foreign-funded and founded organization in Cairo, as well as the objective of the organization's content. Through examining the role of *Safarni* both within the neighborhood in which they worked, *Ard el-Lewa*, and through the organization's shaping of the "discourse of diversity" of the children that participate in their workshops, I hope to better come to understand "the commodification of social and cultural norms/values"[2] and how this commodification affects the performance of identity (through discourse) of these refugee children in Cairo.

Methodology

My analysis of *Safarni's* placement in the neighborhood in which they worked, Ard el-Lewa, and in the development of the children whom participated in the workshop will take place in two different ways. This analysis will then be set against the theoretical backdrop that I will place during my literature review section.

The first method that I will enact is a dissecting of the field notes that I took on the workings of this organization, while I was a *Safarni* volunteer during the spring of 2018. My notes detail the organization, some conflicts that emerged among the different volunteers and

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[2] Elyachar, Julia, 1961. *Markets of Dispossession : NGOs, Economic Development, and the State in Cairo.* , United States, 2005.

employees, and some interesting interactions between the foreigners and the residents of Ard el-Lewa that I find instructive in analyzing the role of *Safarni* within the neighborhood in which they worked. This will allow me to look, in a larger scale, at the role of the organization as a non-state actor in a low-income Cairene neighborhood populated by a large number of refugees.

The second arm of my analysis of *Safarni's* work will be a discursive analysis of surveys taken by the children who participate in *Safarni's* diversity workshops. Two surveys are administered to the children, one before the workshop and one afterwards, and the questions range from basic demographic information to questions such as "what is diversity to you?", and "how do you see yourself as part of your community?". By using my experience working with the organization, I will identify the key phrases used by the organization (such as "this is different to me" rather than "I don't like this new thing) present in the surveys, and see how often these phrases are repeated only in the "after" set of surveys. By looking at the differences in the language that children use after the workshop while talking about concepts such as race, gender, and diversity, I aim to see the ways in which the performance of such concepts (through language) is affected by the work of this non-state organization.

By looking at *Safarni* both at the macro-scale of being an organizational actor in the life of the neighborhood, as well as at the micro-scale as a catalyst for change in the performance of aspects of these children's identities, I aim to find the aspects of the organization where the two aspects of the organizational presence of *Safarni* intersect. These points of intersection and interaction will allow me to draw larger conclusions about how the presence of non-state actors in the political economy of Cairo affect the performance of the identity of refugees.

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