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**MOSAICS OF MASCULINITY –  
GENDER NEGOTIATIONS AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEE MEN IN EGYPT**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis discusses how Syrian men in Egypt renegotiate notions of masculinity during forced displacement. Based on fourteen months of ethnographic research in Egypt in 2014–2015, the thesis focuses on how Syrian men position themselves regarding the label of “refugee”, how they handle changing work and marriage patterns, deal with sectarianism, manage the encounter with Egyptian and Syrian ‘others’, experienced growing up and living in an oppressive state and how the uprising affected them. This thesis suggests that a focus on class should become more prominent when researching refugeeness and masculinity. Furthermore, it pays attention to men’s need for ‘others’ to create successful masculinity, the significance of women’s positions in society and men’s conscious and careful composition of their manhood. This thesis raises the issue of the intimate, paradox relation of men with the state, deals with men’s handling of emotions, and pays close attention to various sentiments and experiences that migrate with men and affect their lives during forced displacement.

*For Abū Wasīm, Abū Aḥmad, and Muḥammad Kh. -*

*and all the others, who keep on going.*

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## **Note on Transliteration**

Arabic words are transliterated according to the system developed by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. Included are special characters, diacritic sounds and long vowels. Where contextually appropriate some transliterations have been adapted to reflect the original dialects that were used (Egyptian and/or Syrian Arabic dialect), such as *argīle* (water pipe) or *tāwle* (backgammon), while others are written in line with the pronunciation of Modern Standard Arabic. Arabic transliterations are italicised and when a term is first introduced a translation is provided within square brackets.

Arabic names of places, towns, and people are transliterated according to the above system unless an alternative transcription is dominant in English. For example, Deraa not Dara‘a, Shia not Shi‘a, Morsi not Mursī.

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## **Introduction: Researching gender negotiations among Syrian refugee men in Egypt**

One evening in October 2014, when I had been doing fieldwork for almost three months in Cairo, after we had eaten and shared *argile* (water pipe), Fādī decided, to show me his workplace. He was in his early twenties, and on arriving in Egypt in 2012 he had had to interrupt his studies in order to support his family. His dream was to become an engineer; however, when I met him he was working in the lingerie shop that belonged to a distant relative, on a busy street in an affluent neighbourhood of Cairo. After he showed me the tiny, neat shop that sold women's tights, nightgowns, underwear and socks, we strolled down the street, absorbed in a conversation about his work and his struggle to simultaneously prepare for his final exams in high school, which he had to retake because his Syrian high school diploma was not accepted in Egypt. We were passing an old woman who was sitting on the sidewalk begging. In a monotone voice, she kept asking for help and because of her accent and the way she was dressed I identified her as Egyptian. Fādī, without interrupting our discussion, slowed down and gave her some money. He made no comment as to his action and continued walking down the street. Only a couple of weeks later, I was waiting for Abū Khālid in the crowded streets of another wealthy and busy Cairene district. I had met Abū Khālid at the beginning of my fieldwork. He was introduced to me as a community leader in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, a satellite town around 30 km outside Cairo, where many Syrians had settled since late 2011. He said he was trying to help Syrian families in need by raising awareness, funds and donations, and this was the reason for our short meeting. As we walked down the road to find a taxi or mini-bus so that we could both return to our homes, an Egyptian child approached us. The boy asked for money and Abū Khālid gave him a couple of Egyptian Pounds before continuing on his way.

Both situations left me utterly at odds with my own stereotypes, ideas and positioning of the prototype of a refugee. They left me struggling with the way I had been raised, and I came to learn about 'the natural order of things', in this case: the location of the host society vis-à-vis 'the refugee'; the position of 'the refugee' in the social hierarchy; and the agency and self-perception of 'the refugee'. They disrupted my prejudice with regards to help and being helped and that 'the refugee' ought to be on the receiving side. At that moment, at the beginning of my fieldwork, these two situations would significantly guide future encounters with Syrian men and women. They made me

ask my Syrian contacts specific questions, such as: ‘Do you feel like a refugee?’ and ‘What does it mean to be a refugee for you?’. Two and a half years later, while writing this introduction in the spring of 2017, I consider these incidents to be evocative of many aspects and themes that are relevant for this thesis. They bring to the forefront questions of class and wealth, of receiving and giving help, of masculinity as a conscious performance and a practice, of my positionality in the field and of the relations between Syrians and Egyptians.

This is a dissertation about the situation of Syrians who came to Egypt after the Syrian uprising<sup>1</sup> in 2011, and to whom the label ‘refugee’ is usually ascribed by national and international aid organisations, the UNHCR, the Egyptian government, and by national and international media. In the first place, this thesis deals with Syrian men and the challenges they faced during forced displacement in Egypt. I explore how they negotiated their status as people who left and lost their home country, which brought me to question the refugee label on a conceptual level and its effects on those, who are put in this category. Furthermore, I trace what kind of challenges Syrian men encountered as participants in the Egyptian labour market and how they faced up to changes in marriage patterns. I analyse Syrian men’s interactions with the Egyptian and Syrian states; their understanding of sectarianism and its impact on their daily lives as well as their feelings and experiences during the Syrian uprising.

The title I chose for this dissertation suggests understanding masculinities as mosaics. I chose it in the first year of my PhD when preparing for my upgrade presentation. At that point in time, I liked the symbol of the mosaic and the idea that masculinities are pieced together, made of various small aspects to create a bigger, complete picture. Over the course of my fieldwork and during the writing up phase, I realised that the metaphor of the mosaic is used frequently when describing Syrian society (see Beshara 2011: 2; Salamandra 2004: 33) or the Middle East more broadly (see Weiss 2015: 65), and when approaching immigration and multiculturalism (see Walter 2006). It was also applied to the context of masculinity studies: Tony Coles (2008: 238) refers to ‘mosaic masculinity’ when he describes the process by which men construct masculinity,

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<sup>1</sup> Following Bjørn Thomassen’s (2012: 690) definition of a ‘political revolution’, what happened in Syria in 2011 and in the years to come cannot be considered a revolution because what is missing is the actual overthrow of the regime. Another reason why I refrain from using the term ‘revolution’ and use instead the term ‘uprising’ in this dissertation is that in contrast to revolution (*thawra*), events (*ahdāth*) and crisis (*azma*), the term ‘uprising’ seems to be the one that is leaning the least to either the pro-regime or the anti-regime side. Among Syrian men and women I met in Egypt, I heard *thawra*, (*ahdāth*) and *azma*, but rarely the term uprising (*intifāda*) when they referred to the situation in Syria in and after 2011. People who called it ‘a revolution’ were usually considered to be pro-uprising, while people who defined it as ‘events’ or ‘crisis’ were assumed to side with the regime.

“drawing upon fragments or pieces of hegemonic masculinity which they have the capacity to perform and piecing them together to reformulate what masculinity means to them in order to come up with their own dominant standard of masculinity”. Coles highlights, in accordance with my own understanding of masculinity, that the bits and pieces that compose masculinity do not always fit neatly into what is supposed to form a bigger, coherent, presentable pattern. The mosaic metaphor is often criticised for being too static and fixed to describe fluid, processual and ever-changing parts of identity or society (see Salamandra 2004: 33). I also received this criticism in my upgrade presentation from my supervisory team. What makes me continue to use this metaphor in the title, knowing that it does not account for the fluidity and instability of identities, is the idea of the small pieces that form a bigger image, an image that is individual and differently formed by each man, and the hard work and effort that need to be put in forming such an image out of various, sometimes broken, and ill-fitting fractions. The idea of masculinity as put together out of various aspects and notions that are present in a man’s social contacts and situations, and the effort it takes to create a coherent masculinity, feature strongly in this dissertation.

This thesis is more about Syria than it is about Egypt; it is more about Syrian men’s contact with other Syrians than it is about their interaction with Egyptians; it is more about Syrian men’s past and its impacts than it is about their present; it is more about their personal and individual endeavours and struggles than it is about their contact with the UNHCR or other aid organisations; it is more about their ideas about life and their attempts to achieve them than it is about their psychological well-being. Moving away from the ‘traditional’ foci of the discipline of refugee studies, such as encampment (e.g. Turner 2016; Horn 2010; Hanafi 2008), psychological conditions (e.g. Puvimanasinghe et al. 2015; Marlowe 2010; Pupavac 2002), contact with aid organisations (e.g. Agier 2010; Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2010; Harrell-Bond 1999), and “women and children” as the main victims of displacement (e.g. Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2014a; Amirthalingam 2012; Mooney 2007; Carpenter 2005; Benjamin 2000), this thesis attempts to present refugeeness from a different angle, paying close attention to the ‘refugee’ as a classed, gendered person, who is defined by his history as well as his current living conditions and future aspirations. Consequently, this thesis does not fit smoothly within refugee studies but should be located at the disciplinary intersection of anthropology, Middle Eastern studies and gender studies. The collection of data is thoroughly informed by, and makes use of, anthropological theories, methods and methodology, while gender, and especially masculinity studies, are the critical lenses that

I use for the analysis and conceptualisation of data. Literature stemming from Middle Eastern studies features strongly because I realised that neither the history and current context of Egypt as host country, nor the country of origin, Syria, could be ignored when framing accounts of Syrian men in Egypt.

This research does not aim to be generalisable, representative or unbiased. These adjectives are so often used to articulate research objectives by scholars following a specific approach within refugee studies, namely an approach influenced by the study of International Relations (e.g. Buscher 2013: 19; Landau and Duponchel 2011: 3; Jacobsen 2006: 285). Furthermore, this research seeks to avoid terms like ‘vulnerabilities’, ‘resilience’, ‘livelihoods’, or ‘coping strategies’ – a vocabulary similarly favoured by some refugee studies scholars (e.g. Buscher 2013; Gladden 2013; Landau and Duponchel 2011; Benjamin 2010; Andrews Gale 2006; Jacobsen 2006). This top-down, often policy-focused approach within refugee studies has been critiqued by anthropologists (e.g. Hayden 2007; Scalettaris 2007; Malkki 1995), legal studies scholars (e.g. Chimni 2009), sociologists and feminist scholars (Gatt et al 2016; Hyndman 2010). They critique its problematic relationship with governmental policy-making and development aid as well as its dependency on policy definitions and concerns (Chimni 2009; Scalettaris 2007; Black 2000). Furthermore, they claim that this approach supported and spread specific taken-for-granted assumptions about the world, the individual and the nation-state (Hayden 2007: 473; Scalettaris 2007), and was uncritical of the use of prominent terms, such as ‘refugee’, ‘IDP’, ‘economic migrant’, etc. (Black 2000; Scalettaris 2007).

Starting from the premise that ‘refugees’ are not a different category of human beings who need an entirely new framework and vocabulary to be analysed or understood, this thesis presents a nuanced, in-depth, gender and class-sensitive analysis that deals with the struggles, challenges and emotions of recently displaced Syrians in Egypt. With its focus on masculinities, this thesis responds to a recent scholarly recognition that women’s migration experiences tend to be over-emphasised while men are neglected in the study of forced migration. If male refugees or migrants are analysed, they are merely represented as oppressive, dangerous, conservative patriarchs or criminals (e.g. Charsley and Wray 2015; Andersson 2014). I seek to complement the existing academic work dealing with refugee women by analysing the perspectives, negotiations, worries, encounters and affective relations of displaced men. The focus on men during forced displacement presented in this thesis can not only contribute to the field of refugee studies, but can also critique and add to the conceptualisations and arguments having emerged from the study of men and masculinities (e.g. Connell 1995; Kimmel 1994;

Wentzell 2015; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003), since it shows how men adapt and are subject to enforced changes, how masculinities are interrelated with place and time, and are thoroughly interconnected with women and femininities. Moreover, this dissertation takes issue with the lack of focus on class in the literature dealing with forced displacement. Instead of locating refugees according to their socio-economic background, refugee studies scholars often identify refugees merely as ‘poor’, ‘vulnerable’ or ‘better off’, or classify them by their belonging to ‘wealth groups’ in the ‘vulnerability context’ (e.g. Buscher 2013: 19; Landau and Duponchel 2011: 3; Jacobsen 2006: 279). In this thesis, I aim to show that class needs to be dealt with more thoroughly in accordance with displaced people’s self-positioning and by focusing not only on their socio-economic situation during forced displacement, but also on their pasts and their strivings for the future. I argue that sensitivity to class has the ability to bring to light and explain endeavours, ambitions and emotions during forced displacement.

Having given a preliminary idea of this thesis, I outline in the following sections relevant historic developments in both Syria and Egypt and provide the context of both societies in order to be able to embed and introduce the main themes and arguments of this thesis.

### *Syria – a brief overview of its history and society*

Life in Syria has been heavily influenced by constant fear of state security mechanisms and a lack of articulated opposition to the government prior to the uprising. Other defining aspects of living in Syria are the assumed fragility and insecurity of the sectarian balance and the importance of the regions that make the nation state. These characteristics are highly relevant, especially when considering the topics of fear, mistrust, lack of community cohesion, loss of status, and experiences of oppression and inequality in the following chapters.

Historians argue that the first signs of a Syrian identity were apparent by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Syria described a geographical location within the Ottoman Empire inhabited by people belonging to various religious and ethnic groups defining themselves primarily via their region (see Beshara 2011; Groiss 2011). The region as a political entity has retained its importance over the centuries, since Syrians are still judged by others and by the state authorities on the basis of their region of origin (Khaddour and Mazur 2013). After World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Syria was ruled for

two years by Faysal Ibn Husayn before it became a French Mandate in 1920 (Meininghaus 2016: 4). From a federation of states, the Syrian state developed, acquired its current geographical shape, and became independent in 1946. The following decade was unstable, with several military coups and counter-coups, and culminated in the proclamation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) by Egypt and Syria in 1958. The UAR broke apart in 1961 and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath party, which had been founded in 1953, was brought to power in a coup d'état in 1963 (*ibid.*: 5). In 1970, Hafiz al-Assad, rising from within the ranks of the Ba'ath Party, became the president of Syria. He created a presidential monarchy on the basis of kin and sectarian solidarity, party loyalty, and the appointment of a majority of Alawites - the sect he himself belonged to - to the Central Committee of the Ba'ath party as well as to the military elite (Hinnebusch 1993: 246). Thus, the Ba'ath Party began its transformation from a movement committed to its ideology into institutionalised clientelism (Hinnebusch and Zintl 2015: 4).

For the regime, it was always of great importance to win the support of the various religious sects and ethnicities, and to avoid conflict with or among them (Ziadeh 2013). Hence, Hafiz al-Assad ruled in a paradoxical way: Officially, he dismissed sectarianism and encouraged instead an inclusive Syrian Arab nationalism and secularism, however, at the same time, politicised sect identities were reproduced and co-opted by the regime and by internal and external enemies (Phillips 2015: 365). Moreover, Hafiz al-Assad expanded the military and security apparatus of the country so that, by the 1990s, fifteen percent of the country's total workforce was employed in these sectors (Chatty 2010: 43). Because of the omnipresence of the *mukhābarāt* (security service), Syrians lived in a climate of fear and encountered other Syrians with scepticism and suspicion. They could not be sure whether one's counterpart was somehow involved in the structures of the *mukhābarāt* and would reveal information about them (Schneiders 2013: 233). Furthermore, the state reduced societal autonomy, destroying or co-opting social forces while creating alternative ones loyal to the regime (Hinnebusch 1993: 246). Another crucial aspect of political life in Syria was an inseparability of the nation from the 'eternal leader' Hafiz al-Assad, who bequeathed his power to his son Bashar al-Assad when he died in 2000 (Ismail 2011: 541). Lisa Wedeen (1999: 6) argues that the regime had disciplined its people to act as if they believed and supported its every word. Citizens should behave as if they were children and Hafiz al-Assad was their father, and they were therefore expected to act as if they loved him and were willing to sacrifice themselves for him (*ibid.*: 65).

While under Hafiz al-Assad state institutions provided basic services and the economy was controlled, Bashar al-Assad introduced a system of “crony capitalism” in Syria, in which members of the president’s family secured rent-producing activities (Aita 2015: 292). Key regime figures and segments of the business community merged into a political-economic ruling class (Azmeh 2014: 12). Additionally, the *mukhābarāt* transformed more and more into a political and economic tool of the regime (*ibid.*). Immediately after he came to power, Bashar al-Assad made space for what is referred to as the ‘Damascene Spring’ – a period of political opening up, in which freedom of speech was, to an extent, possible. Nevertheless, it was only one year later, in 2001, that the regime went back to intimidating, arresting, and convicting critics and oppositionists (Schneiders 2013: 233).

As far as social identity, status and class in Syrian society are concerned, scholarly work produced over the past twenty years avoids giving clear definitions of class status, highlighting instead the relevance of sectarian belonging, region, competitive consumption and the state. Anthropologist Christa Salamandra (2004: 12) advocates the use of Bourdieu’s term ‘habitus’ to properly describe social standing in Syrian society, arguing that religious and class distinctions merge with those relating to region. By this, she means that there is, among other markers, a rural-urban distinction, which serves as a defining characteristic of people. Furthermore, she identifies, when looking specifically at Damascus, that the place of residence within the city defines one’s status and social background (*ibid.*: 41). Salamandra, as well as Khaddour and Mazur (2013), stresses that sectarian belonging must be analysed in the context of social relations that emerge in the regions. Additionally, anthropologist Annika Rabo (2005: 8) undergirds the importance of the state and its impact on class constructions. In the case of Syria, the state has contributed to the growth of the petty bourgeoisie since the 1970s and 1980s. Another aspect of Syrian social identity is competitive consumption, that is, the ability to buy expensive goods and to present oneself in fashionable venues. This type of consumption is gendered: while Syrian men are image-conscious and show their status through expensive clothes, jewellery and cars, women are the ones who represent the family’s status through their outward appearance (Salamandra 2004: 50).

## *The Syrian Uprising*

The Syrian uprising began in 2011 with several small events and protests throughout the country. In March 2011, children sprayed a wall in the southern town of Deraa with the slogan: ‘the people want the downfall of the regime (*al-sh‘ab yurid isqāt al-nizām*)!’. The local governor responded with extreme brutality, ordering the boys to be thrown in jail where they were tortured. Townspeople and the boys’ families reacted with repeated demonstrations over the following weeks (Stacher 2012: 16). The regime countered with violent crackdowns and a siege of the city until May 2011 (Ziter 2014: 1). Eventually, protests and rallies spread throughout Syria, demanding freedom and the end of the rule of the security services. Further demands of the protestors were: the release of all political detainees; the removal of the state of emergency; and constitutional changes that would terminate the monopoly of the Ba’ath party in government institutions (Ismail 2011: 539). Outrage over the regime’s actions in Deraa – the torture of the children; the disrespect shown to the elders, who attempted to negotiate with the regime; and the lack of accountability of the regime officials who had tortured the children, added to dissatisfaction with corruption, authoritarian caprice, and the government’s ignorance about its people’s circumstances (Wedeen 2013: 856).

At the beginning of the uprising, activists and members of the opposition tried to maintain peaceful and nonviolent resistance. However, from its early days, the army quashed the protest movement with violent crackdowns on public demonstrations, arrests, imprisonment, and torture in custody, which was in turn met with further resistance from the population (Ismail 2011: 539). Moreover, the regime provoked sectarian strife by dividing the people according to their religions and regions, and by promoting the arming of the pro-government Alawi population (Sawah and Kawakibi 2014: 154). Since 2012, the conflict in Syria can be viewed as a civil war between the government and rebel forces. Over time, the war started to develop sectarian undertones with clashes between Sunni, Shia and Alawite sects and jihadist groups, such as ISIS (Deardorff Miller 2017: 4). The conflict eventually became fully sectarianised and the multiple opposition forces increasingly engaged in combat against one another (Lawson 2017: 13/14). In 2013, Syria saw an acute escalation in armed conflict as the government intensified its attacks and began using increasingly deadly and indiscriminate weapons, including a chemical weapons attack on the Damascus countryside in August that year (Human Rights Watch [HRW] 2013a). Eventually, the conflict became a proxy war involving Iran, Russia,

Hezbollah (supporting al-Assad) and Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan and the US (supporting Sunni rebel factions) (Deardorff Miller 2016: 5). By 2016, the death toll had risen to 470,000; 6.1 million Syrians were internally displaced and 4.8 million were seeking refuge abroad. Since 2011, 117,000 people have been detained or have disappeared. By mid-2016, an estimated one million people lived in besieged areas (HRW 2017).

Having briefly introduced the context in Syria, I now turn to give an overview on Egypt's society, history and political situation before and at the time of my fieldwork.

### ***Pre- and post-uprising developments in Egypt***

In the past decade, Egypt has experienced a number of tumultuous years after decades of relative stability and constant authoritarian rule under President Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir (1952-1970), Anwar Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011).

Various developments led to the popular uprising in 2011 that put an end to then-president Mubarak's thirty-year long rule. For instance, the Egyptian government liberalised its economy over the previous decades, reducing public services and subsidies, selling off a significant share of the public sector, and decreasing government employment (Singerman 2013: 4). In this process of liberalisation, Mubarak's government launched legal reforms to guarantee ‘flexible’ employment, privatised agriculture, removed trade barriers and put the interests of capital above all else (Abdelrahman 2015: 7). The gradual removal of the welfare structure, and state subsidies on food, education and housing sectors had a major effect on the economic well-being of the rural and urban poor (Ali 2003: 323). Agnès Deboulet (2009: 202) identifies a “generation of neoliberal modernity” that lives predominantly in informal neighbourhoods, consisting of deprived families who do not receive any security from the state because of the unavailability of subsidised goods and services as well as the scarcity of jobs and low wages. Sixty percent of all workers in Egypt are employed in the informal economy, which means that most of them lack minimum wage protection, health insurance, pensions, sick leave, paid vacations, maternity benefits and trade union protection (Singerman 2013: 1). Furthermore, a significant number of Egyptians are either unemployed or underemployed, and even those with higher education often have to work in the informal sector (Grabska 2006: 15). For Syrians coming to Egypt, this means that they enter a saturated, overcrowded and unstable labour market and live in an

overall climate of precarity facing the same struggles as Egyptians, if not more severe ones, due to the challenges that result from their labelling as refugees.

In order to facilitate neoliberalism, political rights were severely restricted under Mubarak's rule. There was no opportunity for Egyptians to organise any political opposition or to hold political meetings, and it was forbidden for the few legal opposition parties to arrange public activities. Human rights workers and opposition journalists became the target of repeated intimidation by closures, court cases and imprisonment (Mitchell 2012: 233). Moreover, with the rising impoverishment of society and the fear of Islamists gaining influence in the poor neighbourhoods, Mubarak's government invested heavily in increasing the power of the police. Since the 1990s, police violence became endemic and gradually more visible, taking place not only in police stations and detention centres but also on the streets (Abdelrahman 2015: 16/17). Torture was not an exception, but was applied regularly as an interrogation method. It was not only perceived criminals who were subjected to torture, it was also employed against 'ordinary' citizens (*ibid.*: 19).

According to Hafez (2012: 38/39), men in general, and young men in particular, became the target of random state violence, torture and humiliation in Mubarak's Egypt. State power was made effective and oppressive by installing a sense of arbitrariness and unreliability, which fostered a feeling of helplessness and dependency on the state. An Egyptian friend of mine, Islām, who was in his late twenties and was from Egypt's upper middle class, remembered when we talked about Mubarak's rule that policemen could stop anybody and confiscate whatever was in their pockets. "It was a tool for the past regime to oppress people and keep their mouth shut", he told me bitterly. Cynthia Enloe (2013: 78) argues that Mubarak's regime sought to establish a connection between class and masculinised thuggery, aiming to present male civilians from a working-class background as thugs, in contrast to the professionalised male security police forces. Based on Islām's account, conversations with other middle-class Egyptian men, and my own experiences and observations in the streets of Cairo, I argue that this police tactic was not only directed at lower-class men, but in fact at men from all social backgrounds, and did not disappear with the end of Mubarak's rule. Syrian newcomers in Egypt were similarly affected by and feared the Egyptian state authorities and their cruel interrogation methods. Abū Walīd, for instance, whose problems I introduce in the coming chapters, suffered from the ill-will and power of the Egyptian police in the form of blackmailing and threats by an individual police officer. He found no way to get away from the police officer's control and the suffering he caused him.

Poverty, unemployment, the uncontrollable power of the police, and a lack of political freedom were some of the reasons so many Egyptians stormed onto the political stage in January 2011 with the goal of bringing down Mubarak and his regime. According to Hazem Kandil (2012: 218), Egypt had become a failed state in the eyes of its own people. It was perceived as the state of the upper class with laws only being passed so that the rich could make themselves richer by breaking them. The poor had to pay taxes while the rich evaded them, since bribery and corruption had become normalised. Confronting the regime and demanding its fall was grounded in moral disarray and anger, fed by a language of political discontent and a fantasy of a better life (Schielke 2015: 180). Other aspects that are commonly perceived as having sparked the uprising were: discontent with an older generation that had accepted and compromised with corrupted political and economic elites; useless political parties, state-run unions; and the presence of an educated younger generation who could not put their potential to use (Chalcraft 2012).

When Mubarak stepped down on 11 February 2011 the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took over and immediately announced a withdrawal from politics after a six-month transition period, when power would be passed to an elected authority (Kandil 2012: 228). During the SCAF rule, which in fact lasted for eighteen months, violence against demonstrators remained systematic and reached its peak during the fights on Muhammad Mahmoud Street in November 2011, where nerve gas and live ammunition were used, and killed close to a hundred activists. In February 2012, the Ultras, who played an important role in the street battles in 2011, were assaulted during a football game in Port Said, when security forces prevented anyone escaping from the stadium, leaving around seventy activists dead (*ibid.*: 231). While in power, SCAF organised two rounds of presidential elections, ballots for both upper and lower houses of parliament, and two sets of constitutional referenda, in all of which the Muslim Brotherhood managed to increase its power. Consequently, SCAF's rule resulted in the reaffirmation of the military's privilege and power in economy and state institutions, and the dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood in both houses of parliament, and thus, Muhammad Morsi, the candidate of the Brothers, became the President of Egypt in 2012 (Abdelrahman 2015: 73).

Morsi's presidency did not last more than a year. Sociologist Maha Abdelrahman (*ibid.*: 112/114) argues that while the military wanted to continue ruling the country behind the scenes and had accepted the Muslim Brotherhood as its civilian face, it readily abandoned the Brothers in 2013 when they proved to be incapable of creating a stable

political environment. In June 2013, Morsi was removed from power by an alliance of the military, the Ministry of the Interior, old system loyalists, liberal media, and radical revolutionaries. He was succeeded by a new military regime with a formal civil leadership, while the Muslim Brotherhood became the victim of brutal suppression (Schielke 2015: 186). On 14 August 2013, security forces stormed two demonstration camps of Morsi supporters, Rabaa Square in Cairo and al-Nahda Square in Giza, killing at least 817 people. Moreover, the new military regime initiated a campaign of mass arrests of over 40,000 political prisoners and issued 509 mass execution sentences in 2014 (Mandour 2015). ‘Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, the new president, promised to free the country from terrorism, provide security and stability, and bring about economic changes, which increased his popularity. The regime managed to unite large parts of the population through a nationalist and security discourse based on the demonisation of the Muslim Brotherhood. And thus, by declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation, an enemy was constructed that evoked a sense of fear and insecurity (Abdelrahman 2015: 136/137).

Not only did Syrian newcomers in Egypt live with the Egyptians through these unsteady times of frequent demonstrations, attacks and street fights, they were also vulnerable in a specific way during the political upheavals of the post-revolutionary years and to the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood, which I discuss in the following section.

### *Syrians in Egypt*

Syrians had settled in Egypt long before the uprising in 2011 and the consequent arrival of many thousands fleeing Syria. The first wave that came to Egypt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century consisted mainly of Greek Catholics. A second wave of immigration of Christian Maronites, Greek Orthodox Christians and Muslims started in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and ended with WWI (Philipp 1985). By 1914, about 35,000 Syrians of different socio-economic and educational backgrounds were living in Egypt, most of whom were Christians and a minority were Muslim (Booth 2011: 228). They automatically received Egyptian citizenship unless they explicitly opted for another one. However, after WWII several laws were imposed, and national and religious tendencies became more prominent so that the lives of minorities in Egypt worsened and many left (Abdulhaq 2016: 195). During the period of the UAR, again, many professional Syrians and businessmen left

Egypt because of Nasir's socialist political system (Barbir 1986 cited in Ayoub and Khallaf 2014: 20).

At the end of 2011 and in 2012, when Syrians began arriving in Egypt, having fled the rising violence and insecurity in their home country, then-president Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood allies supported the Syrian uprising and there was a welcoming attitude within Egyptian society, especially among Egypt's ageing Nasserist generation, young liberal activists, the Muslim Brotherhood and Anti-Alawite Islamists (Ali 2012). Morsi announced Egypt's full support for the Syrian uprising, emphasised an open-door policy for Syrians entering Egypt, and granted Syrians full access to public services. Since Egypt has no policy of encampment, Syrians settled all over Egypt, predominantly in the governorates of Cairo, Alexandria, Damietta and Mansoura (Ayoub and Khallaf 2014: 7). In August 2013, immediately after Morsi was toppled, visa restrictions for Syrians were imposed. Furthermore, Syrian refugees became the subject of a government-organised media campaign that labelled them as 'terrorists', allies of the Muslim Brotherhood and supporters of Morsi. This generated an increase in xenophobia and discrimination against Syrian refugees in the Egyptian population, which was still affecting them in their daily lives, albeit to a lesser extent, when I began conducting my research in August 2014. Because of the demonisation of the Muslim Brotherhood driven by al-Sisi's regime, being considered a supporter or sympathiser could seriously damage one's reputation or could even be dangerous. This had a direct impact on the conditions of Syrian refugees in Egypt, since the majority of Islamic charities that had provided them with major support were shut down in the summer of 2013. I witnessed how the head of a Syrian private nursery in which I volunteered, a woman of Syrian-Egyptian descent wearing a *niqāb* (face veil) and a long black dress, became the object of rumours that she was a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood, so she had to close the nursery and move to another place in the spring of 2015.

After the public campaigns that fuelled anti-Syrian sentiments in 2013, there appeared to be a new trend in the Egyptian media in 2015 that used the plight of the Syrians as a political tool to expand the support for the military and al-Sisi's regime. Rīhām Sa‘īd, an Egyptian broadcaster, for instance, posted a video of herself handing food and clothes to Syrian refugees in a Lebanese camp. After having complained about the Syrians and how they disrespectfully grabbed the donated items, she described their plight and their behaviour as the fate of a people whose country was destroyed. The clip ends with the broadcaster praising Egypt's armed forces (*AlNahar TV* 2015). Another time, Sa‘īd used the picture of Syrian-Kurdish toddler Aylan washed up on the shore to

make the point that Egyptians should support the army. As described critically by a journalist of *Madamasr*, Sa‘īd said that the military was fighting on the Egyptian borders to prevent such a tragedy from happening and asked the rhetorical question of who could be still against the army (Magid 2015). When I discussed these video clips with Mahmūd, a tour guide in his thirties, whom I had got to know in Syria and met again in Cairo where we spent a lot of time together, he said to me: “they use us as a lesson” meaning that in Egypt the Syrian civil war was taken as a tool to promote the people’s support for the regime.

Another trend can be observed in official speeches and statements by al-Sisi and his government: in an article by Daily News Egypt the regime presented itself, despite the economic difficulties Egypt was facing, as selflessly supporting their “brothers from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea” (Youssef 2015). In a speech in September 2015, al-Sisi said that Egypt had accepted at least “500,000 people of our brothers (*ahlinā*) from Syria”<sup>2</sup>. He continued: “The UN counted only 130,000. No one heard our voice. And no one heard our voice when we welcomed them”. In this speech, al-Sisi further highlighted that the Egyptian state had to be prevented from becoming a “refugee state”. Nevertheless, he stressed that refugees in Egypt would be treated as if they were Egyptians, since they had access to all social, educational and health services (MENA 2015). Before he moved on to another topic, al-Sisi said, “So why did I start by talking about this? Because our strategic goal is to keep the Egyptian state. [...] We don’t want the idea of defending and keeping our country to be absent from our thinking. Always remember to protect our country...”. In 2015, upon the release of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), an aid plan for Syrian refugees in the Middle East and the host communities, Abdulrahman Salah, then-Assistant Foreign Minister for Arab and Middle Eastern Affairs, reiterated that Egypt had taken it upon itself from the beginning of the refugee crisis to support its Syrian brothers by offering full and free access to the same public services provided to Egyptians (3RP 2015).

The public statements by the Egyptian regime gloss over the fact that al-Sisi’s government introduced major restrictions in 2013, effectively denying Syrian refugees access to Egypt. Likewise, the emphasis on free access to education is a euphemism, since Syrians who want to enrol their children in Egyptian public schools or universities must first meet several requirements. Muhammed, a student of dentistry in his early twenties,

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<sup>2</sup> I watched and translated his speech in September 2015 via the following link:  
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=jqfkVupCabs>.

who founded an NGO helping Syrians in Egypt to gain access to education, explained the challenging process of enrolment to me. Syrian students are not able to enrol at an Egyptian university unless they can present their birth certificate, Syrian high school diploma and a letter from the Syrian embassy in Egypt. In the context of a community who fled from a civil war, such requirements effectively diminish the number of Syrian students who can successfully enrol in Egyptian universities and schools.

Yet another discourse has developed around the Syrian presence in Egypt: at a workshop in winter 2016, an Egyptian scholar told me that nowadays successful Syrian entrepreneurs would be praised in the Egyptian media for their resilience and creativity in making a living in Egypt. And indeed, several Egyptian TV shows, among them *Kalām Tānī* (Dream TV Egypt 2017), deal with the assumed productivity and creativity of the Syrians in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, vis-à-vis the ‘idleness’ of the Egyptians.

The difference between the Egyptian and the Syrian dialect was another recurring theme. Many Syrians felt the need to avoid using their dialect on the streets, especially in the aftermath of 2013 when they were publicly denounced as supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood protests. Many Syrians told me that there was a communication problem when Syrians arrived in Egypt in 2012, with the Egyptians not understanding them. Therefore, Syrians had to adapt and learn the Egyptian dialect. Looking at the context of Palestinian refugees who fled to Jordan, Massad (2008) argues that a “battle of the accents” took place. In a process that came to create Palestinians as the ‘other’ against which Jordanians defined themselves, two distinct accents developed and became national markers. The fronts over dialects hardened when the urban Transjordan population felt that the Palestinian upper-middle class who settled in less developed small towns in Jordan engaged in a nation-class narrative of superiority. The battle of the accents had a gendered component, too. Among urban Jordanians, certain pronunciations were defined as more masculine, while others were created as feminine. Palestinian men, in order to not be perceived as feminine, began to imitate the perceived masculine pronunciation among Jordanians. It is also true for the Syrian-Egyptian context that dialects are a strong marker of nationality and have a gendered aspect. However, the confrontation of the Syrian and the Egyptian dialects was less direct than in Jordan, since the number of Syrians arriving in Egypt was smaller than the number of Palestinians in Jordan and most Syrians I met used the Egyptian dialect in public. Nevertheless, throughout my fieldwork, I was engaged in many debates with Syrians and Egyptians about which dialect was closer to *fusha* (Modern Standard Arabic), more grounded in Arab history and Islam, easier to learn, and more beautiful. Both Syrians and Egyptians

made fun of the other's dialect. Syrians said that Egyptians were not able to speak or understand anything but their own, not very beautiful dialect, while Syrians had been able to adapt to the situation and speak with an Egyptian accent in public. Often, I heard from Egyptians that the Syrian and Lebanese dialect was erotic if a woman spoke it, but was considered gay if a man was talking.

### ***The field site: Cairo***

The settings of my fieldwork were Cairo and the satellite town of 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, where I conducted research for fourteen months.

My image of Cairo is that of a cosmopolitan, crowded, dirty and loud city that never sleeps; its streets blocked with buses, trucks, taxis and donkey carts; the smell of exhaust and garbage in the air; and the sound of honking that barely even stops at night. Looking at Cairo from the perspective of a village in Northern Egypt, Schielke (2015: 10) describes that the capital is 'the place to be' within the country, where the financial, political and cultural elites converge. It is the place that promises wealth, career, power, culture and glamour, even though the path of social advancement in the capital is in fact difficult. And indeed, despite its glamorous, cosmopolitan reputation in the countryside, many parts of Cairo cannot fulfil this promise: some of the urban poor and the middle-class poor live in cemeteries, on rooftops and on public lands on the outskirts of Cairo, creating informal communities. Greater Cairo hosts more than 111 informal settlements ('ashwā'īyāt), where more than six million people have created homes for themselves (Bayat 2010: 80/81). Cairo is divided into various neighbourhoods that differ significantly in their character and history, from upmarket gated communities in New Cairo and gardened villas in al-Ma'adi, to the dilapidated Downtown, and numerous *sh'abī* (local, popular) areas that house the majority of Cairo's lower-class population. Crossing the often-invisible line between two districts, I felt that lifestyle and expected behaviour differ significantly, and for a newcomer, it takes a while to recognise these lines and codes of behaviour. There is a connection between place and class in Cairo, and one's particular background and performance determine in which part of the city one can feel at home and how one is perceived and treated.

Egyptian society is extremely stratified and class-conscious with class background marked by one's lineage, education, income and housing (see Schielke 2015; De Koning 2009; MacLeod 1991). There is also a strong association between socio-

economic privilege and cultural superiority (De Koning 2009: 46). Education is considered the marker of, and key to, social respectability. It is perceived as a guarantee of work outside the personal services and cleaning sectors, both of which imply a distinctly low standing. Thus, a manual worker will be perceived as being from a lower class than an unemployed university graduate, even though the latter has no income while the former earns a wage. This is because the unemployed young graduate still embodies the promise of a future middle-class life while the manual worker has apparently settled for less (*ibid.*: 76). Schielke (2012: 132) describes the modern middle-class lifestyle as “the aim of almost every Egyptian” – an aim that was motivated by the influx of imported goods and migrants’ remittances in the 1970s. Likewise, an upper-class lifestyle is predominantly dependent on consumption, public demonstration of one’s good taste in terms of international food and fashion, and mixed-gender socialising – all of which can be practised and presented in the newly built compounds and malls on the outskirts of Cairo (Peterson 2011: 141).

In Cairo, I knew and met Syrians in various neighbourhoods, such as in the expensive gated communities of Rehab and Medinaty, in upper- and middle-class areas, such as al-Ma‘adi, Dokki and Medinat Nasr, and in lower-class neighbourhoods, such as Faysal and Haram. In 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, Syrians lived in the affluent neighbourhoods close to the Huṣarī Mosque, but I also visited families in the extremely poor areas of Masakin Othman or Bayt al-‘Āila. 6<sup>th</sup> of October City (which has been often referred to in national and international media as ‘little Syria’) has attracted many Syrians to move there over the past years because of the availability of Syrian goods and restaurants, the presence of various aid organisations, affordable rent, and the possibility to avoid engagement with Egyptian neighbours.

### *Refugees in cities*

Life for refugees in cities differs notably from the more restrictive experience of encampment. Generally, studies have found that refugees in urban contexts are more often able to generate income, mostly through informal labour. Furthermore, according to refugee studies scholar Karen Jacobsen (2006: 283), refugees in cities can more often rely on social capital, that is local friendships, aid organisations, charity-minded individuals or diasporic communities. Landau and Duponchel (2011: 5) stress that living in an urban context can translate into social mobility and freedom of movement. Conversely,

however, refugees are struggling under the challenges the receiving cities face, such as over-population, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient public services (Buscher 2013: 17). They often lack support networks, face legal uncertainties due to their status, and become victims of xenophobia (see Sommers 2001; Dryden-Peterson 2006; Briant and Kennedy 2004, Sperl 2001; Jacobsen et al. 2012). Other problems that evolve in the urban context are difficulties with regards to access to education for children (Dryden-Peterson 2006: 382), expensive medical care (Banki 2006: 343), and little legal support or police protection (Briant and Kennedy 2004: 440). Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016) stresses that there should be a focus on urban refugees' experiences of "overlapping displacement", that is, that forced migrants often share a space with other displaced people. Refugees of various nationalities may experience mistrust, segregation and divisions in their contact with each other, but may similarly be advantaged through their relations with other refugee communities (*ibid.*) Living as refugees in Cairo, these challenges of living in the urban context are exacerbated by the need for Syrians to get used to Cairo's sheer size, its transportation system, the long distances, blocked roads, crowds of people, the constant noise, and the smell. Moreover, the poverty, authoritarian governmental legacy and unstable political climate in Cairo impact on refugees and make Egypt's capital "an uneasy refuge", "a troubled host" and "a source of anxiety" for refugees (Danielson 2015: 15).

The fact that Syrians in Egypt did not live in camps but had settled in various parts of Cairo was one of the aspects that affected my fieldwork to a significant extent. As it is the case with any urban anthropology, there was no clear-cut 'field site' but only a network of Syrian men and women spread across Cairo and 6<sup>th</sup> of October City that I tried to keep track of by embarking on daily journeys through the city. I could only meet people when they explicitly invited me and wanted me to be there and take part in their lives. I was not part of a commonly shared social space, where encounters and joint activities might have occurred more 'naturally' and regularly, but rather always a guest, who was welcomed to houses, cafes, offices or communal spaces, but only when the time was right for my contacts. I was a visitor occasionally allowed to take part in my contacts' lives. I suggest that being in the position of the visitor provides the interlocutors with the advantage of knowing that they can control their contact with the researcher. They are thus freer to speak and choose what they want to share in the researcher's presence than in a situation where daily contact is unavoidable. Conversely, however, this meant that I had to deal with the fact that Syrian men and women disconnected from me when they faced troubles and that there was no 'natural' way to share these times with them because

of the lack of physical proximity in Cairo. Sometimes, I would not hear from Syrian acquaintances for several months and only once they reached out to me again did I find out that they had been going through a difficult time. For instance, this was the case with Suhayr, whose situation I describe in more detail in Chapter 3. She was married to an Egyptian man and used to invite me regularly to her flat. I had been teaching her three daughters for several months. However, suddenly, she cut her contact with me without explaining why. After six months, she got in touch with me again, asking whether I could teach her daughters during the summer break. When she eventually invited me to her new flat, she told me that she had experienced a divorce in the previous months and had to find a new place for herself and her children. As Suhayr's case illustrates, the lack of regular contact at certain times was not only due to the absence of physical proximity, but similarly grounded in the instability and uncertainty inherent in the lives of Syrian newcomers in Egypt. Like Suhayr, several Syrian contacts of mine would move to new neighbourhoods unexpectedly, would suddenly not attend my classes anymore, or would leave Egypt for good and I could only wait for them to get in touch with me again.

When reflecting on my fieldwork, I find similarities with Zina Sawaf's (2017: 14) ethnographic strategy in Riyadh that she describes as lateral movement foregrounding "instability, placelessness and vastness". She argues that her fieldwork experiences felt like a constant movement between inclusion and exclusion, inclusiveness, marginality, integration and feeling like being cast out (*ibid.*: 15). Having conducted research in Cairo and facing the daily challenge of reaching out and meeting my contacts all over Cairo, I similarly felt temporarily part of a group, then completely disconnected, sometimes included in a circle of friends, and in the next moment far away without any ability to bridge the (spatial) distances. As Sawaf (*ibid.*: 22) suggested, being in and manoeuvring the urban context defined my interpersonal encounters and illustrated my role in the field as a temporary visitor in other people's lives and private spheres.

### ***Doing fieldwork***

When I came to Egypt at the beginning of August 2014, it was not my first visit to the Middle East. I had spent a year volunteering in a Coptic orphanage in Cairo directly after I graduated from school in 2007. In the following years, I returned to Egypt for several internships that lasted between two and six months, spent six months in Palestine and visited several other countries in the Middle East.

In 2009, I had spent six months in Syria studying Arabic at the University of Damascus. This time had given me an idea about the regime, its security apparatus and Syrian society in a nutshell. I remember that I once asked a friend of mine from Hama on a car ride from Damascus to his hometown, what had happened in the 1980s to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and what he knew about the massacres that had taken place in his home town.<sup>3</sup> To my surprise, he simply stopped talking to me for a while and we sat in awkward silence before he introduced another topic, completely ignoring my question. I was also surprised to find that whenever my language partner wanted to say something critical about Syria, he would close the curtains and start to whisper. And eventually, I got to experience the arbitrariness of the Syrian security apparatus: when I left the country in February 2010, hoping to come back for a longer stay after graduation, the border police at the airport stopped me and left with my passport and my ticket only to come back to tell me that I was not allowed to enter Syria again. When I said, utterly confused and in a panic, that I was just a language student and that I was not doing anything wrong (thinking of all the things I learned not to do while being in Syria, such as travelling to Israel or publishing journalistic pieces about Syria), he coldly and stoically repeated that it was written on his computer that I would never be allowed to access Syria again. Scared and shocked, I boarded the plane. I had to accept that with most of my Syrian acquaintances I would not be able to keep in touch because social media was heavily restricted and controlled in Syria at that time. Apart from a few Syrian friends, who left before the uprising to Europe or the US, I only managed to stay in touch with Mahmūd, the tour guide, who came to Egypt in 2011 to try to establish his business in Cairo.

When conducting fieldwork from August 2014 to September 2015, I met and talked to Syrian and Egyptian men and women. Egyptian participants were mostly acquaintances I had met during previous visits and their friends and relatives. My Syrian interlocutors hailed from various villages and cities in Syria and were of different ages. As far as my interlocutors' religious and ethnic background is concerned: apart from one man who identified as Christian, I only met Syrians who presented themselves to me as Sunni Muslims. In Syria prior to 2011, Sunni, Shia, Christian, Druze, Isma'ili and Alawite communities lived together (see van Dam 2017; Sluglett 2016). However, in Egypt, I could not detect the presence of all those sects among Syrian refugees. Most Syrian Muslims I met were knowledgeable with regards to Islamic rules and traditions, pursued a lifestyle in accordance with Sunni religious ethics, and followed religious obligations

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<sup>3</sup>In 1982, an uprising by the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in Hama was brutally destroyed by the regime through a siege of the city leaving more than 20,000 people dead (see Lia 2016; Lefèvre 2013).

like praying, fasting during Ramadan, paying *zakāh* (almsgiving), etc. In terms of religious affiliation, I thus analyse the narratives and arguments of a group that presented itself as homogeneous to me.

Regarding their legal status in Syria, I met one family whose roots were Palestinian. This family had lived in Syria in Yarmouk refugee camp and they held a special legal status both in Syria and Egypt. Apart from this family, all the other Syrians I met were ‘Syrian citizens’: their belonging to the Syrian nation was unchallenged (in contrast to the case of 200,000 Syrian Kurds who were considered ‘stateless’ prior to 2011).

Most of my interlocutors I met through my voluntary work as a teacher of English and German in various NGOs. These NGOs, most of them privately established and run, usually provided a space for me to teach a variety of groups. Over the course of my fieldwork, I had several women-only classes, one men-only class, which I taught together with a male volunteer, and classes for students who did not attend school in Egypt or had just returned to school. As a language teacher, I was not part of the regular NGO staff and was only admitted for as long as the class lasted. Hence, my dealing with NGOs, their agendas and management of humanitarian aid was limited. Sometimes, my contact with students developed into regular meetings outside the classroom, and several times, my students introduced me to their close family members and other relatives. Moreover, at the very beginning of my fieldwork, I met a couple, Abū and Um Khālid, who described themselves as community leaders and introduced me to several families whom they perceived as impoverished and needy. They hoped that I would not only visit these families regularly, but would also raise financial, food or clothes donations for them after having been introduced to their plight – all of which I did, especially over the course of the first six months of my fieldwork.

Over the course of fourteen months of fieldwork, I conducted sixty-one semi-structured interviews with Syrian and Egyptian men and women, most of which were recorded. I documented some in the form of written notes. These interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, were predominantly carried out in Arabic and translated afterwards. Due to my engagement in voluntary work, I had various informal conversations on a daily basis, which I noted in my fieldwork diary. With some Syrians I met I then developed close relationships: we started to meet regularly and eventually, usually after several months of knowing one another, they gave me permission to record an interview with them. Semi-structured interviews were usually guided by questions

about the interlocutor's childhood and life in Syria, about their individual experiences of the Syrian uprising, their reason for fleeing, and the challenges of living in Egypt. In addition to these intimate, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, I sometimes had the chance to engage groups in discussion, usually when I was invited by a contact, who had gathered friends and family to meet and talk to me.

### ***Being a researcher during “a new era of repression”***

In August 2014, when I started my fieldwork, the hope for a better Egypt that had been so present during my visits in 2011 had vanished. Most of my Egyptian friends who had been on Tahrir Square were depressed and felt betrayed. I remember a conversation in which Ashraf, an Egyptian friend, told me bitterly that he had gone out on to the streets and risked his life for the good of the whole country. Ashraf, who was from a wealthy family, studied at an international university and worked as an engineer, felt that he had not needed the revolution as much as the millions of urban and rural poor in Egypt. He could not believe that he and his friends, who could have simply enjoyed the privileges they had through their social background, had protested against a dictator and his regime, and the outcome was the installation of yet another dictator, Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. Likewise, Schielke (2015: 183) recounts that it was particularly those Egyptians who had actively participated in street protests in 2011 who came to express a frustrated and sceptical vision of the situation and the country's future.

Post-revolutionary Cairo in 2014 and 2015 was relatively quiet compared to the preceding years. Nevertheless, I sensed an underlying tension that defined my daily life and dictated my decisions. My fieldwork was embedded with what Amr Hamzawy (2017) describes as a ‘new era of repression’, which included accusing civil-society activists of treason and foreigners of espionage, depriving citizens of their freedom with legal backing and through police brutality. I felt its presence in conversations with both Egyptians and Syrians, when I read about cases of ‘forced disappearances’ on social media, and whenever I had to introduce myself and explain why I was in Egypt. The ‘new era of repression’ was the reason I decided not to affiliate myself with any institution, such as the American University in Cairo, why I put my SOAS online profile to sleep before I left for Egypt, and why I used to say I was in Egypt for personal reasons, volunteering as an English teacher and studying Arabic with a private teacher.

Helena Nassif (2017) makes a brilliant argument about the change of self-consciousness and self-perception as a researcher in post-revolutionary Cairo, especially after Giulio Regeni's<sup>4</sup> murder. Even though my official fieldwork ended six months before his killing, the insecurity she describes speaks to the ubiquitous tension, endless worries and self-control that were part of my daily life in Egypt. I constantly surveilled and governed myself, wondering if anything I did could have turned me into a subject of concern for the Egyptian *mukhābarāt*. Every three months, when I had to reapply for my tourist visa, I had trouble sleeping and spent the days in brooding anticipation, hoping that it would be extended without any inquiries. The first time I tried to extend my visa in October 2014, I was told by the employees in the *Mugamm'a*, a massive government administration building at Tahrir Square, that my file had to be checked and that I could come back after a week to reapply. I spent the week paralysed with shock, trying to imagine what it would mean to relocate myself and my fieldwork to Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey. An Egyptian friend of mine, whose father had *wasta* (connections), offered to ask him whether I had to worry about being forced to leave. His father called me a couple of days later to tell me that I would not get in trouble, refusing to mention who he had called, what was said and if the secret service were indeed keeping an eye on me.

In order to maintain the anonymity of participants in this thesis, I use pseudonyms and give only vague ideas about age and places of origin. In some cases, I also disguised key identifying details such as profession, or information about family background. One participant asked me to embed the narrative he wanted to share with me in an identity that made identification impossible, so as to protect himself and his family back in Syria, which I did. Even though several men, mostly younger ones, who felt secure and stable in Egypt, did not mind the possibility of being identified, the majority wondered nervously who would get to read this thesis and whether it could somehow affect them, their future or their loved ones. Generally, I realised that Syrian men and women tended to be restrained and cautious when it came to the recording of their voice or the use of their stories if they could be traced back to them. Even when I asked the three men mentioned on the first page whether I could dedicate this thesis to them, they asked me repeatedly what such a dedication was worth and whether this would get them in trouble. Eventually, each one of them asked me to write their name so that only they and their

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<sup>4</sup> Giulio Regeni was a PhD student from Cambridge conducting fieldwork on labour unions in Cairo. He disappeared on the fifth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution and was found dead showing signs of torture in a ditch close to 6<sup>th</sup> of October City several days later. Evidence strongly suggests that the Egyptian secret service is responsible for his murder (see Amnesty International 2017; Soliman 2017; Nassif 2017).

loved ones would know that it was them who I was thanking and acknowledging. Only at that point did I feel that the three of them sensed the recognition and appreciation I had meant to convey to them.

### ***Refugees as ‘research objects’***

Having briefly discussed several aspects of my fieldwork, I now turn to what I consider explicit challenges I faced in Egypt especially with regards to positionality, issues of power during the research process, ‘reciprocity’ and responsibility towards participants.

While writing this introduction, I realised that I was troubled by the ‘standard way’ of positioning myself and those who participated in this research. I realised that there is a standardised way of ‘positioning oneself and others’, when I was asked by several blind peer-reviewers, who read article manuscripts of mine, to share my positionality by mentioning in one paragraph my language, gender, ethnicity and nationality, and to say who my participants were with regards to their age, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. I struggle with this kind of ‘standard’ for various reasons: first of all, it assumes that by positioning myself and my counterparts in a certain way, in a “visible landscape of power” (Gilligan 1997: 313), I, as a researcher, can circumvent false neutrality. However, following Rose Gilligan’s argument, this way of positioning oneself depends on the idea of a “transparently knowable agent whose motivations can be fully known” (*ibid.*: 309) and a clearly structured space that can be entirely grasped and understood by the researcher (*ibid.*: 310). Opposing this approach, Gilligan (*ibid.*: 314) calls for an understanding of positionality as relational and of the self as “a decentred site of differences”.

In this context, again, a question asked by Kanafani and Sawaf (2017: 6) speaks to me: they wonder “how to do ethnography with attention to the subjective experience of the ethnographer without rendering subjective experiences into token gestures, or worse, into “‘ready to wear’ products of identity politics”” (Robertson, 2002: 788 cited in Kanafani and Sawaf 2017: 6”). Likewise, Richa Nagar and Susan Geiger (2007: 268) urge for a critical engagement with reflexivity and positionality but stress avoiding defining oneself by the same categories one seeks to disrupt and unpack in the research process. Rather than referring to pre-given social categories, such as ‘white’, ‘female’, or ‘middle class’ in order to position oneself and others, they emphasise that reflexivity and positionality should be understood as processes (*ibid.*: 272). Nicole Laliberté and Carolin

Schurr (2016: 73) argue that it is through consideration of one's emotions that a researcher can manage to properly pay attention to power hierarchies in the research process. They understand emotions, following Sara Ahmed (2004), as embodied experiences of social relations and thus suggest analysing our emotional encounters in the field as an outcome of “bodily memories and histories of contact between racialized, gendered, sexualized, and otherwise differentiated bodies” (Laliberté and Schurr 2016: 74). They stress that our way of acting in the field is an emotional reaction to our encounters with others. Kanafani and Sawaf (2017: 10) suggest a form of self-reflection that deals with “inter-subjective landscapes of emotional, sensory and epistemic/rhetorical experience, which compels—often by way of self-doubt and anxiety—methodological strategies and manoeuvres as necessary avenues towards understanding”.

I began this thesis by writing about the evocative encounters that put my taken for granted knowledge in question and introduce the challenges I was confronted with in the field by using my emotions as a starting point, recognising that “*where and when* the field is constituted starts to shift between the conditions of the field and the emotional states that ethnographic labour entails and tries to capture” (Kanafani and Sawaf 2017: 8, emphasis in original). I also pay attention to emotions in the following chapters, albeit to a lesser extent, in order to give space to Syrian men’s and women’s narratives and accounts and to minimise the risk of patronising them in my writing. I believe that in the end, I and my emotions should not be at the forefront when analysing Syrian men’s experiences during forced displacement. Instead, this thesis ought to give space to the experiences and stories of Syrian men and women and these should not be overlaid but rather only accompanied by the opinions and emotions I felt in relation to the telling of their stories and my following analysis. I wanted to find a balance between presenting my emotions and theirs, because, as Sara Ahmed (2004: 11) argues, emotions are not necessarily felt and experienced in similar ways.

### ***Responding (or failing to respond) to loss and need***

“[Anthropologists] are observers yet participants. We collect life histories and other data from individuals, analyze them and construct theories which ‘absorb’ our informants’ stories into the larger context of human experience. Yet we also glimpse the private worlds of others, share their pains and struggles and at times espouse their causes” (Chierici 2007: 306).

The ‘pains’ and ‘struggles’ that were the most difficult to witness for me relate to working among people who had left a war-torn country – many of them in dire need of financial support, contacts and network. Especially in the first six months of my fieldwork, I was challenged when confronted with some families’ extreme poverty and neediness after they had lost their savings or their provider and turned to raising donations as a way of ‘giving something back’.

There were, for example, Um and Abū Khālid’s contacts in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, who had experienced severe impoverishment: Um and Abū Māzin could not afford medical treatment for Um Māzin’s inflamed gum so that she had to eat liquid food for weeks; Um Bāssim was unable to pay the rent; and Um ‘Abd Allah, who was in her 70s, had to take care of her grandchildren after her son had died in the war. She could neither afford clothes for the children, nor could she buy the medication for her husband that he needed to live with his chronic diseases. Witnessing their struggles and suffering made me extremely uncomfortable and so I decided to raise donations among Egyptian and German contacts of mine. I did this for a couple of months. It was not only challenging to accept the Syrian families’ poverty, but also my initial reaction to their suffering – a “Western” way of believing that with money s their circumstances could somehow easily and continually be eased.

On the question of reciprocating with financial and economic rewards, there is a debate both in refugee studies and in anthropology. As noted by the refugee scholars Catriona Mackenzie, Christopher McDowell and Eileen Pittaway (2007: 303), refugees participating in research might have unrealistic expectations of the benefits of research and the researcher’s impact on legal or resettlement processes. Consequently, the authors call on researchers, to avoid to “merely document[ing] the difficulties of refugees and their causes without, whenever possible, offering in return some kind of reciprocal benefit that may assist them in dealing with these difficulties and, where possible, in working towards solutions” (*ibid.*: 310). For these scholars “a sufficient justification for research into suffering of others is, if it reduces future suffering of other populations, for example by generating lessons about how to minimize similar suffering in the future” (*ibid.*: 311). Similarly, Barbara Harrell-Bond and Eftihia Voutira (2007: 290) argue that the only way to engage refugees in research is “to convince them that the research is in their own best interest either because it addresses urgent conditions of survival or because it acknowledges their presence and historicity or both”. Both statements leave me wondering: how can the researcher assume what is in ‘the refugee’s’ best interest and

how can the researcher confidently guarantee that he or she is able to change something for the better for ‘the refugees’ and provide ‘solutions’ to their situation?

On the other hand, several scholars strongly advocate giving something material back to their respondents. Vinay Srivastava (1992: 18), for instance, focuses on the question of ‘fair returns’ supporting the idea that interlocutors must be properly reciprocated. He suggests, among other things, making a gift to individuals, gatekeepers or the entire community. Sukarieh and Tannock (2012: 501), after various conversations with members of an over-researched community in Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon, came to the conclusion that research was perceived as valuable only if it was “connected to a tangible social change”. Those frequently interviewed felt that research questions did not concern their challenges but were conceptualised outside of the camps, solely oriented towards themes considered relevant in Western university contexts. The outcome of such, often poorly conducted research, consequently did not bring them any concrete benefits. Sukarieh and Tannock (*ibid.*: 502) point out that Palestinians in Shatila camp were deeply aware that they were mainly a tool, “a lab for experiments” as one informant called it, used to boost researchers’ careers. Scholars often gave them false promises and made use of the power hierarchies within the camp: they searched for respondents through NGOs and the people, who were recipients of the NGOs’ aid could not make free choices as to whether they wanted to participate but had to give in to the pressure from the NGOs to be interviewed (*ibid.*: 505). Sukarieh and Tannock (*ibid.*: 507) urge researchers to pay critical and reflective attention to the positioning of all parties involved in a research process within “local, regional, national and global structures and processes of power, identity, inequality, interest and control” in order to confront the problem of exploitation, furthered suffering and humiliation at the hand of researchers.

Even though I believe in the importance of ‘giving something back’ to those under research, understand the suffering of over-researched communities, and cannot but agree with Sukarieh and Tannock’s calls for thorough positionality of all parties, I also experienced that the pressure to collect funds, whether clothes or money, was sometimes unbearable and, once money was involved, the relationship with informants usually changed. This was the case with Um and Abū Khālid and the families they had introduced to me. As much as I tried to clarify that the financial and material donations I managed to raise were not from my own pocket but were given to me by Egyptian and German acquaintances, I was directly associated with the donations and I was eventually judged and treated, based on my ability to give something. I had to realise that a few Euros, given by friends and family, were not sufficient to permanently change the situations under

which these families suffered. The donations could perhaps provide with a form of momentary relief, but they were never enough to truly ease their problems, which were of a completely different dimension. In addition to the realisation of the insufficiency of giving donations, I sometimes felt reduced to a ‘cash cow’ and I also often felt that participants threw the responsibility of their survival entirely on me. Being constantly pressured to ‘do something’, once I had been given the status of a ‘helper’, made me feel extremely uncomfortable because there was only so little I could do, especially once the interest and capabilities of donors decreased.

### *An unbridgeable hierarchy*

Another challenge I encountered was related to my whiteness and belonging “to the world of privilege and power” (Jackson 2013: 200) conducting research among people who at that time did not have access to this world. With some Syrian contacts of mine, mostly the ones in less fortunate circumstances in Egypt, I experienced a barely bridgeable hierarchy and struggled with interlocutors’ ideas and consequent expectations of me. It took time to realise this hierarchy based on whiteness and power and this process of realisation was painful, as my interaction with Salīm illustrates.

Salīm came to the office of an NGO where I spent the day volunteering. He picked up free diapers that the NGO provided, and was eager to speak to the *bāhitha* (researcher). He emphasised that he had experience working in Dubai as an engineer and that his wife was the first French teacher in their area back in Syria. In Cairo, however, Salīm could not find work, despite his professional background, which was causing him a lot of distress. He could not afford the rent for his small flat in a slum in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, and did not know how to buy food and clothes for his four children. He had started to work as a street vendor next to the Huṣarī Mosque. In our conversation, his mood changed from angry to friendly, aggressive to sad. Among other topics, he expressed his anger and disappointment in the UN staff and other aid agencies. He complained that at the UN office, he was told to come back another day but never got an appointment, and the two aid agencies he had approached had also refused to help him. Eventually, he directed all his anger and disappointment at me. He asked me what I could do for him and demanded that I wrote down the identification number on his ‘yellow card’ in order to support his case at the UN office in Germany. When I expressed doubts about my ability to influence his case, he shouted angrily as to how could I refuse to help him, while I was obviously

getting paid for my research and could live a good life by using his and other Syrians' stories. He only calmed down after I told him that I was not paid by anyone. He apologised, said that he was only joking and added that the whole situation was making him stressed and nervous. Salīm had anticipated that I had the necessary network and influence to move his case forward because of my positionality as a German researcher, and arguably came to talk to me for this reason. When he realised that he had invested time and effort by sharing his story with me and that I could not give back the expected support, he became angry.

Similarly, my encounter with Um Walīd made me question my position in the field. Um Walīd was a young mother of two boys and attended one of the all-women English classes I offered. After knowing her for several months, she started to share with me in our chats after the classes her worries about her family's future in Egypt. She once asked me if I knew people working for the German embassy and I answered her honestly that I had briefly met a couple of German staff members. One day, Um Walīd told me that her husband was in serious trouble, since he was being regularly blackmailed by an Egyptian officer. I asked her whether I could meet her husband to learn more about his predicament and interview him for my research. She promised to ask him and told me a couple of days later that he was ready to meet me. After I had met her husband at his workplace and was walking in the streets, overwhelmed that he was being harassed, threatened and blackmailed by an Egyptian police officer and was unable to protect himself, I received a message from Um Walīd. She asked me whether the interview he had given me would increase their chances when applying for a visa at the German embassy. Shocked, surprised as to why she asked me this, and eventually embarrassed and ashamed because I realised that I had raised false hopes in her, I had to tell her that neither my research nor my contact to the people I knew at the embassy would impact on her chances to apply for a visa. Only later, did I come to fully understand the extent of this incident. I realised that Um Walīd had pushed her husband to share his story with me – a dangerous endeavour given the circumstances he was in and the minimal knowledge he had at that time about me and my intentions. However, what seemed to have convinced Um and Abū Walīd to allow me to learn about their situation was their belief that I could somehow help them to leave Egypt for Germany.

The encounter with them thus made me recognise my privileges compared to their neediness and dependence and the consequent hierarchical asymmetry that defined our relationship. My nationality and contact with other Germans, which I had briefly mentioned to her, had made her assume that I was in a position to help her leave Egypt

and I had naively not expected to raise such hopes in her. Even though I had learned about these issues in my pre-fieldwork training, I had somehow not expected to encounter them so viscerally during fieldwork. As it was the case when I witnessed two of my contacts giving money to Egyptian beggars, through my encounters with Um Walīd and Salīm I was confronted with my own stereotypes, my taken for granted assumptions and the unrealistic image I had of myself and others.

Literature dealing with feminist ethics of care pays close attention to issues such as exploitation of research subjects, reciprocity and giving back for the privilege of asking informants about their lives. As Beverley Skeggs (2001: 434) argues: “[we] enter ethnography with all our economic and cultural baggage, our discursive access and the traces of positioning and history that we embody. We cannot easily disinvest of these. In fact, we may not even know that much about ourselves”. Accepting that I was not aware of all the aspects of my baggage helped me to ease the shame and discomfort related to my encounter with Um and Abū Walīd and Salīm.

Finally, I should stress that contact with the Syrian and Egyptian men and women who participated in this research did not end on 28 September 2015, when I left Egypt for London. Just this morning in the spring of 2017, while writing part of this introduction, I was contacted by a dear Syrian friend still residing in Egypt, whom I met during the fieldwork and whose story is part of this research. While there is a lot of training that deals with questions of how to ‘enter the field’, I realised that there is a lack of literature and training related to how to ‘exit the field’. In my case, just like in the case of any anthropologist who stays in touch with interlocutors after the official end of fieldwork, there was no ‘easy way out’, but ongoing interactions and sometimes “open-ended and imponderable relations” (Kanafani and Sawaf 2017: 8) with participants. I went back to Egypt for a few visits in 2015 and 2016, when I met a few participants again, and I am in regular contact with several of them via social media. Some conversations continued when meeting participants after they had left Egypt during or directly after my fieldwork and had sought asylum in Germany. My fieldwork thus connected different times and places, in and outside of Egypt. The ongoing interaction meant that it took me a long time to emotionally disconnect and distance myself from fieldwork, decipher encounters and feel ready to write about people and their experiences from a rather analytical and conceptual angle.

## ***Chapter overview***

The coming chapter, the chapter dealing with feelings of dignity, arrogance and humiliation, introduces encounters and experiences that instilled a sense of refugeeeness in Syrians after their arrival in Egypt, among them their contact with the UNHCR, insecurity related to identity documents and a physical discomfort. The chapter then turns to document strategies Syrian men used to disconnect themselves from the negatively connoted refugee label. This process includes the formation of the image of a refugee and one's disassociation from it by creating distances from those, who were found to fit the stereotypical refugee image. The prototype of a refugee was the Syrian man who fled to Europe to seek asylum.

Chapter 2, the chapter of pride, shame and judgement, explores Syrian men's negotiations of paid labour and experiences in the Egyptian labour market. Syrian men in Egypt identified the ideal of a Syrian middle-class masculinity through discourses around their own and other men's approaches to work and unemployment. This chapter also illustrates men's engagement with and praise of 'traditional' complementary gender roles and their sense of "patriarchy-as-usual" (Kandiyoti 2013), as well as the trouble they experienced when gender relations were subject to change. This is demonstrated in the context of Syrian women who started working in Egypt and men's response to it.

In the third chapter, dealing with misrecognition, love and fury, the focus is on Syrian men's positions as bachelors in the marriage market trying to find a Syrian bride. Young Syrian men realised that their accumulated (economic, symbolic and cultural) capital and status did not travel with them to Egypt. This put them in a situation, in which they had to compete and struggle if they wanted to convince the potential bride and her family that they were a good catch.

The chapter of rage, estrangement and hate, Chapter 4, engages with various processes of 'othering'. It discusses the importance of an intersectional approach to masculinity, how sectarianism is an influential marker on Syrian masculine selfhood, and how Syrian masculinity is further marked by contact with the Egyptians and the consequent establishment of ideal Syrian middle-class manhood vis-à-vis its multiple others.

In Chapter 5, the chapter of fear, uncanniness and mistrust, I discuss Syrian men's encounters with the Syrian and Egyptian states and their authorities. Being aware of the regime's oppressive methods and injustice, most men had to comply and find a way to

live and survive under dictatorial regimes. Furthermore, this chapter sheds light on the omnipresent fear of the Syrian security service and how it did not stop at the borders of Syria but travelled with Syrian men to Egypt.

The last chapter dealing with sadness, depression and despair challenges the connection between masculinity and armed combat that is often perceived as natural. By engaging with Syrian men's understanding of the army, the militarised upbringing and the use of weapons back in Syria, it manifests that men are critical, sceptical and aware of their expected support of and engagement in armed combat, which they however reject for various articulated reasons. Instead, men search for other accepted masculine roles, such as fatherhood, which they can adopt instead of militant masculinity. Another significant aspect of this chapter is men's responses to and experiences of the uprising.

## **Chapter 1: Positioning this research in academic debates**

This chapter introduces the central theories and concepts around which this thesis is built and it aims at positioning this research in relevant academic debates. I begin by presenting the perspective I use to approach the research, which is informed by the concept of intersectionality, and continue by summarising the development of masculinity studies. Then, I introduce how I approach the subjects of emotions and class in the context of forced migration, and I end the chapter by alluding to the topic of masculinity and the state.

### ***Intersectionality***

Intersectionality is the lens I apply throughout this thesis to explore how Syrian men in Egypt made sense of forced displacement and how they strategised to find an acceptable version of masculinity for themselves. The core concept of intersectionality was introduced by legal scholar Kimberley Crenshaw (1991: 1245) who argues that a focus on intersectionality is needed “to account for the multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed”. Looking at masculinity from an intersectional lens means to analyse how forms of social differentiation, such as class, race or age, influence, form and shape masculinity. Masculinity is understood to vary for different ethnic groups and to be potentially damaged or strengthened by its specific intersection with class, ethnicity, age, etc. (Christensen and Jensen 2014: 69). Furthermore, an intersectional lens is crucial to grasp the formation of masculine identities as strategies and performances which emerge within distinct local contexts and in certain social and sensual realms drawing on specific sources and capacities available from one’s surroundings (Hopkins and Noble 2009: 813 - 816). Applying an intersectional perspective helps to highlight the significance of a man’s position in his life-course, including his marital and parental status, for an analysis of the construction of masculinities.

### ***The development of the study of masculinities***

Masculinity studies has flourished over the last four decades. Tim Edwards (2006:2) structures the developments in the discipline in three waves. The first phase refers to the development of the sex role paradigm in the 1970s to apply more directly to questions of masculinity. The emphasis was on demonstrating the socially constructed nature of masculinity and on how these processes were limiting to men. The second wave of masculinity studies emerged, according to Edwards (*ibid.*), in the 1980s and was concerned predominantly with power and its complex meanings and operations. The introduction of the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Carrigan et al. 1985; Connell 1995) was a significant moment in the developing discipline. This concept, which defines the existence of various masculinities competing for power based on the subordination of women, received wide recognition. However, it was also severely criticised: critiques referring to the nature of men’s conformity to hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Wetherell and Edley 1999); the concept’s failure to recognise situations in which various hegemonic masculinities coexist (see Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994: 20); or the constructed dualism of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities (Demitrou 2001). The third wave of masculinity studies is, again according to Edwards (2006: 3), influenced by the advent of post-structural theory and has a common focus on representation and its connection with wider questions of change and continuity in contemporary masculinities and identities. What unites studies of this wave is their emphasis on the social and cultural construction of masculinity. Another aspect that has concerned the study of manhood, especially in the 1990s, was the question of whether there was an ongoing crisis of masculinity (*ibid.*: 22).

One of the most-cited and well-known concepts in masculinity studies is, as already mentioned, Connell’s concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. In her work, she (Connell 1995: 76) not only identifies the existence of various forms of masculinities within the male gender, but also describes a hierarchy among them. She argues that masculinity is relational, intersectional and situational and exists in contradistinction from femininity. Hegemonic masculinity refers to the supremacy of one form of masculinity, which, at that space and point in time, has the “accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (*ibid.*: 77). Connell (*ibid.*: 79) emphasises that indeed not many men meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity in a given pattern of gender relations; however, they may still support it since they benefit

from the overall advantage of subordinating women. Several empirical case studies have been framed with the help of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Ismail 2006; Birenbaum-Carmeli and Inhorn 2009; Jaji 2009; Hafez 2012; Haugbolle 2012). They mostly reference Connell to explain culturally dominant ways of being masculine; to describe and categorise marginalised and subordinated groups of men; to reference a competition for domination among men; to analyse women's ability to shake masculinity or to discuss men's reaction to challenges of their masculine identity. The main challenge I see with Connell's concept is to translate a rather sociological, structured and static approach into an anthropological one that aims to pay close attention to incongruities, contradictions and struggles with masculinities.

Another classic conceptualisation of masculinity worth mentioning is Michael Kimmel's (1994: 128) focusing on men's homosocial environment. He theorises masculinity as a constant fight for recognition and approval by other men. In his understanding, women are relegated to a 'currency', which men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale (*ibid.*: 129). Masculinity is a homosocial enactment, guided by the fear of being unmasked and rendered unmanly. Women and gay men become the 'other' against which heterosexual men project their identities. Consequently, only a selected group of men can achieve manhood (*ibid.*: 134/135). Again, while his concept is thought-provoking and features with its focus on 'othering' in several arguments of this thesis, it is the challenge to translate a static concept coming from sociology into an anthropological analysis.

### *Approaching the study of masculinities*

My approach to studying masculinities is not only informed by Kimmel's and Connell's concepts but also draws on a range of developments in anthropology, human geography, Middle Eastern and migration studies.

Literature on manhood in the Middle East has increased significantly over the past decade. Most authors suggest approaches that pay tribute to life changes, transformations, diversity and historic specificity (see Naguib 2015; Ghannam 2013; Inhorn 2012; Monterescu 2006). Moreover, recently developed concepts of 'Middle Eastern masculinity' take into consideration the fact that gender is always changing and in progress, and differs depending on the social context people face. Medical anthropologist Marcia Inhorn (2012: 31) for instance, focuses on the emergent social and physical

changes in men's lives such as fatherhood or marriage, aging or disease, and men's various and differing responses to these life changes. Anthropologist Farha Ghannam (2013), who conducted long-term, ethnographic research in one of Cairo's low-income neighbourhoods, suggests the concept of 'masculine trajectory', which she uses to describe the process of becoming a man and how, during this process that lasts over a lifespan, men identify with various ideals, norms, and values. Masculine trajectories do not develop neatly, nor are they fixed in order of their steps, rather they are defined by ambiguity and contradiction. Ghannam's (*ibid.*: 7) approach takes into account both the ideal version of manhood many men hold on to, and the unexpected and often messy reality men are confronted with. Her analysis highlights men's aspiration for approval by their surroundings and their consequent struggle and effort to conform to the norms and expectations of the society they live in.

I find it additionally useful to conceive of masculinities as subjectively and actively constituted (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003), and as composites of various acts, attitudes and relationships available at a given time in a specific context that are weaved by the individual into a "coherent masculine selfhood" (Wentzell 2015: 179). Moreover, I draw on Daniel Monterescu's (2006) metaphor of masculinity as being at the centre of an imagined polygon communicating dialectically with the vertices. He argues that the categories positioned at the vertices "serve as symbolic referential axes from and to which one measures the appropriate cultural distance which marks the inferior alternatives to the hegemonic Arab masculinity" (*ibid.*: 129). Ultimately, Monterescu suggests that masculinity is incoherent and internally fractioned. He, like others, highlights the importance of recognising that there exists "an array of vectors of relationality" (Hopkins and Noble 2009: 815) and thus urges researchers to engage in an intersectional analysis of masculinity.

Finally, my understanding of masculinity is influenced by Judith Butler's (2004: 42) argument that the masculine and feminine are performed, produced and naturalised and that (gendered) norms come into being because they are iteratively produced and constantly re-done, even though people are unconscious of their continuous involvement in the conditions that structure their lives (2010: 168). According to Butler (1999: 173), gender is an ongoing bodily performance of imitating what is broadly understood as acceptable acts, behaviours and desires. Nevertheless, performativity is not a choice but a repetitive "practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (2004: 1). Moreover, she (*ibid.*: 4) highlights that gender norms define how one can appear in public, how the public and the private are distinguished, who becomes subject to stigmatisation, and who

experiences precarity in one's surrounding (2009: iii). Thus, gender performativity is constrained by the boundaries in which a subject becomes eligible for recognition and is perceived and accepted as a living being (2004: 4).

### ***(Forced) migration and masculinity***

The existing literature in the field of gender and displacement has predominantly focused on female and child refugees. Anthropologist Doreen Indra (1999: 2) was one of the first to argue that gender in the study of forced migration should not be automatically equated with women, but should instead be viewed as relational, informed by, and having consequences for, both men and women. Highlighting the relevance of masculinity studies during forced displacement, scholars began to stress that men and women should not be analysed in isolation from each other, that intersectionality is an important lens, and that the focus on manhood shows how traditional power structures are subject to change (e.g. Matsuoka and Sorensen 1999; McSpadden 1999; Schrijvers 1999). While the importance of intersectionality, the relevance of relationality and the interdependence of the construction of masculinity and femininity have been discussed in depth by feminist researchers over the past decades, combining these approaches with the study of forced displacement was novel and necessary.

There is a body of literature that deals with men in conflict and their consequent migration (see for example Lewis 2014; Large 1997; Dolan 2003). This literature shows men's specific vulnerabilities during armed conflict, such as the burden many men sense because they are expected to conform to the ideal of militant masculinity. Non-combatant men often experience a loss of economic and political power and can thus barely achieve markers of the normative model of manhood. From this literature I developed a sensitivity regarding Syrian men's challenging position as non-combatants and show in Chapter 7 how Syrian men in Egypt negotiate this position.

Another significant body of literature originates in the study of male, young Palestinian refugees born into refugee camps (see for example Achilli 2015; Hart 2008). This literature pays specific attention to the difficulty of finding an acceptable version of manhood for oneself in the context of protracted displacement often without a clearly defined legal status. Furthermore, the literature on Palestinian refugees is evocative of the significant relation that exists between gender, nationalism and the 'nation-in-exile' (Hart

2008, Massad 2006). I will extend the analysis of gender and the nation state in this thesis by discussing how Syrian men had a paradoxical relation to the Syrian nation state.

More recent work in the field of migration studies, like Charsley and Wray's (2015: 404) article, has yet again recognised the invisibility of men in the study of (forced) migration and calls for a deconstruction of the homogenising, generalising and negative image of the 'migrant man'. The authors stress that male migrants merely receive public attention as the 'illegal immigrant', who is both villain and victim, anonymous and out of place, and bereft of national belonging (see as well Andersson 2014: xxxiv).

Based on these conceptualisations of gender and masculinities, stemming from the fields of (forced) migration studies, Middle Eastern studies, gender studies and anthropology, and based on the analysis of my fieldwork data, I have come to perceive of masculinity as an endeavour and a product, its performance dependent on its respective audience and subject to change if context and audience are altered. Furthermore, I understand masculinity as an aspect of men's identity that is protected and shielded. It is communicated through actions, practices and narratives and needs 'others' not only as an audience, but also to serve as an abject prototype, as the 'currency' of masculinity, as a role model or as the controlled.

### *Conceptualising emotions*

Initially, I organised the six chapters of this thesis around themes and topics, such as work, marriage, contact with the state, and sectarianism. However, I realised that these themes go hand in hand with certain emotions and I started to ascribe these emotions to the chapters. Emotions began to feature stronger and stronger in my thinking about, and analysis of, the material I had collected and thus the thesis took its final shape containing a chapter of fear; a chapter of anger, rage and hate; and a chapter of utmost despair. There is a chapter of loss – be it loss of control, loss of status, loss of a name or loss of possessions; a chapter that features struggle and endurance; and another that deals with confusion and its consequent struggle to regain a sense of clarity and mastery of the situation. Ultimately, I argue that an intersectional analysis of masculinity requires that attention is paid to men's emotions.

The emerging significance of emotions in the process of analysing my data warrants a paragraph describing what informs my understanding and use of 'emotions'. I provide a conceptualisation of emotions based on literature in the fields of cultural

studies, anthropology, sociology and to a lesser extent in masculinity studies as I found refugee studies scholars were predominantly occupied with refugees' psychological well-being, mental health, anxieties, depressions and trauma (see Shidlo and Ahola 2013; Ahearn 2000; Summerfield 2005), while emotions as a marker, a map or an informative expression of the conditions of refugeenesss are rarely analysed.

Emotions are, especially in Western contexts, predominantly associated with women, while reason and thought are the realm of men. Based on this widely-held assumption, anthropologist Catherine Lutz (1996: 151) concluded that every discussion of emotions automatically has a gendered component. In the way American men and women she interviewed talked about the need to control emotions, Lutz (*ibid.*: 152/154) found a proof that both women and their emotionality are perceived as a danger, which legitimates control because allowing emotions to be experienced could threaten the order. In most publications stemming from the field of masculinity studies, the discourse of associating men with thought rather than emotion is reiterated. Most versions of hegemonic masculinity in various traditions and contexts do not build on feelings (e.g. Connell 1995; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). Rather, literature from the field of masculinity studies recognises that men's emotions are suppressed, kept at a distance and are a sign of femininity in contrast to masculine thought and reason (e.g. Seidler 2006; Shamir and Travis 2002; Connell 1995; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994). The fear of being considered unmanly, of losing control and showing fear is thus assumed to motivate certain forms of behaviour in men (de Boise and Hearn 2017: 8; Pease 2012: 129). Acceptable emotions in men are rage, anger and aggression (e.g. Ghannam 2013; Levant 2004), while vulnerabilities and 'unmanly' emotions are found to be turned into anger and violence (e.g. Seidler 2011; Levant 2004). The consideration of emotions in the study of masculinities thus reflects the persistent discourses and representations around 'manly' and 'unmanly' emotions and the pressure to conform to them. What the traditional study of masculinities and emotions lacks, however, is a focus on the gap between those prominent images and assumptions and men's actual sensuality and affect, as well as an exploration of the ways men understand and interpret emotions (see de Boise and Hearn 2017: 2; Hopkins and Noble 2009: 816).

There is a recent trend in sociological approaches to the study of men and masculinities that aims to fill this gap, starting from the premise that emotions are outcomes and configurations of resources available in men's specific contexts (Cottingham 2017). However, this trend focuses predominantly on privileged, heterosexual men from the global north (Pease 2012: 127), and mainly questions whether

new forms of hegemonic masculinities appear, whether there is a change towards more gender equality, and whether masculinity generally shifts and changes (e.g. de Boise and Hearn 2017; Cottingham 2017). These scholarly works are thus of limited help for the conceptualisation of emotions and masculinities I pursue in this thesis, since Syrian men I met were not in a conscious process of redefining their masculinity towards more ‘sensitivity’ and gender equality. Rather, they were in many ways overrun and overtaken by the events and accompanying emotions they experienced. What I nevertheless consider useful for the conceptualisation and understanding of emotions in this thesis is the observation of sociologists de Boise and Hearn (2017: 2) that men’s emotions are context-dependent and historically contingent based on patriarchal and colonialist frameworks. Likewise, Lutz (1996: 158) drew a connection between the control of emotions and the colonisers’ perception of the colonised as both uncivilised and dangerous, coming to the conclusion that emotions are closely related to frameworks of dominance and control. Moreover, de Boise and Hearn (2017: 12) underline the need to understand men’s emotions intersectionally, as both affective and affecting, and suggest researching men’s emotions by paying attention to bodies, language and historical discourses, as well as to the researcher’s personal emotional experiences and assumptions.

For this thesis, it is additionally important to highlight that the use and experiences of emotions are not only gendered, but are also classed as described by sociologist Diane Reay (2004). She argues that, as well as economic, cultural and social capital, as introduced by Bourdieu, there is also emotional capital that women and men from different social class backgrounds draw on in specific ways. She suggests that emotional capital comes into being within affective relationships and contains the stock of emotional resources that people share with those they care about (*ibid.*: 60). Skills in managing emotions, for example through masking them, also qualify as emotional capital (Cottingham 2017: 4). The constitution of emotional capital differs between different social class contexts albeit to a lesser extent than Bourdieu’s other capitals (Reay 2004: 69/70).

The concept I consider most useful for this thesis is Sara Ahmed’s (2004) perception of emotions as both ‘sticky’ and moving, as connecting and attaching. Emotions denote a version of bodily change, are interrelational, intentional and directional. They are culturally produced and thus prove one’s apprehension of the world. Based on Butler, Ahmed (*ibid.*: 12) argues that emotions attach themselves to social forms of subordination. These social forms are outcomes of repetition and appear as set

standards only because the effort that needs to be put into their reiteration is concealed. Furthermore, Ahmed (*ibid.*: 10) suggests the model of the ‘sociality of emotions’, through which she describes that emotions have the ability to shape and demarcate: “emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside”. She portrays emotions as a glue that binds groups, and aligns and mobilises them through their circulation and distribution (2004a: 118). Her focus is on how emotions create coherence and collectivity through their ability to unite groups often through demarcation of a distinct ‘other’. This argument is important for this thesis, especially when analysing the various ‘others’ that Syrian men actively created. However, this thesis also shows that emotions work as a dissolver, unmaking communities and groups.

As Samar Kanafani and Zina Sawaf (2017: 5) describe, fieldwork brings the researcher in contact with various emotions, such as fear, suspicion and discomfort, which bring them to wonder “what kind of critical knowledge can attention to these aspects of the ethnographic encounter (and the methodological adaptations that ensue) generate”. Based on Ahmed, I suggest that through the Syrian men’s expressed, remembered and embodied emotions, it is possible to analyse how they see and understand the world and how they locate themselves in it. I perceive of these emotions as contours of my interlocutors’ experiences and by recognising these emotions and tracing them they can become a bridge to broader underlying, interconnected issues. Being guided by my interlocutors’ emotions was for me a way of knowledge-making and thus I trace in the following chapters how their emotions shed light on processes of ‘othering’, their drawing of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and their need for clearly defined demarcations to recreate their masculine selves. Furthermore, their emotions illustrate how and why they relate to certain social norms, such as the patriarchal gender order. I perceive of emotions as markers illuminating the intensity with which Syrian men experienced certain losses and as signposts guiding towards linkages and connections between their past and present, their masculine selves vis-à-vis various others including the nation state. For this reason, I briefly engage with the profound relation between men and the state in the coming paragraph.

### ***Masculinity, middle-class identity and forced displacement***

As I have already mentioned, there is a noticeable absence of analysis of social class in the field of refugee studies. Often, social class is merely hidden behind other terms, when refugees are described as ‘vulnerable’, ‘poor’ or ‘better off’. In this thesis, I explore the significance of class, in particular middle-classness, among Syrian men in Egypt. For them, middle-classness was a marker of their identity, an approach to life and forced displacement and played a major role in their understanding and construction of masculinities.

Belonging to the Syrian middle class was an important and recurring theme in conversations with Syrians living in Egypt. Most of them defined themselves as middle class (*tabaqā mutawassīta; hāla maddiyya mutawassīta*), on the basis of their former work position, family background and possessions. Syrian men and women I met referred to properties, such as a chalet at the beach or a beautiful house they owned, also mentioning their family’s status, education and influence. Middle-classness was perceived to grant people stability, modest wealth and happiness. Syrians highlighted that middle-classness was dependent on the region one originated from and on one’s upbringing. Despite the reiterated discourse of belonging to the middle class and even though the few reports and assessments that exist describe Syrians in Egypt as stemming predominantly from a middle-class background with work experience and (initially) secure savings (Ayoub 2017; Ayoub and Khallaf 2014), it is important to stress that the group of Syrians is not homogenous. While I mostly met people with a similar background, I also got in touch with Syrians who I would ascribe to a working-class or upper-class background based on their former profession, education, savings and income. Furthermore, several families I met were severely impoverished after they came to Egypt, having lost their savings over the years.

Existing literature in the field of refugee studies recognised the fact that financial resources and networks determine migration routes and the destination country of refugees (see Van Hear 2006). In a few publications, it has been acknowledged that a forced migrant remains a ‘classed’ person and that, consequently, class impacts on the migrant’s position in social hierarchies in both the home and host communities (Van Hear 2010: 1531 cited in Stepputat and Nyberg Sørensen 2014: 91). Human geographer JoAnn McGregor (2008: 467), researching the Zimbabwean diaspora in Britain, understands class primarily as an ascribed or assumed cultural identity. Zimbabwean migrants are

positioned and locate themselves in relation to their workplaces, neighbourhoods, British social discourse and the state's legal categories, as well as family networks and social judgements in their homeland. Furthermore, there is a relation between being conscious about one's class and a sense of loss, which can lead to the experience of anxieties among migrants. McGregor (*ibid.*: 468) suggests that these anxieties are due to the difficulties in making one's social status transfer to the host country because of new racial hierarchies, the need to accept low-status jobs and legal barriers. Nauja Kleist (2010: 198) finds that an educated middle- or upper-class background in the context of migration or forced displacement can ease the start in the host country, but can also lead to a sense of frustration and misrecognition, especially if the social position in one's country of origin cannot be established in the host country. Stef Jansen (2008: 182) suggests, by analysing the context of Bosnian refugees living in resettlement, that the celebrated social status Bosnian men remembered was not transferrable to the country of resettlement because it was dependent on a specific time-space context that no longer existed. This literature thus suggests paying attention to the relation of class to loss and the struggle of migrants to make their social status travel with them – themes I discuss in Chapter 4.

The rare combination of an analysis of class, forced migration and masculinity, conducted by Lucy Ann McSpadden (1999: 251) shows that class and status affect men's judgement of good and bad lives and that men from a high-class background "favoured class-congruent life trajectories and at least verbally rejected what they judged to be class inappropriate". It is to such an argument that I aim to tie my own intervention, namely that class status, especially middle-classness, affects refugee men's thinking, ambitions, judgements and behaviour. Certainly, a focus on class is relevant to embed changes in gender relations. Additionally, I suggest that it sheds light on refugees' priorities and decisions during forced displacement as well as on accompanying emotions, for example shame, alienation or superiority.

In my approach to class, I follow Don Kalb (2015: 14), who suggests that the study of social class from an anthropological perspective needs to take into consideration the intersections between "place and space, between local time and world time, between production and reproduction and among local pasts, presents, futures, as well as the ways that these are connected to the rituals of everyday life". Consequently, I understand class as a notion related to the historical, temporary and spatial context and as being visible in people's way of life. Following Heiman et al. (2012: 13), I believe that class is researchable by paying attention to its articulation in and through "culturally specific parameters of gender, nation, race, and ethnicity". And in accordance with Mary Rizzo

(2015: 5), I perceive of class as related to income, education and profession, but also to dress, comportment and body language. This was already put forward by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1987: 5) who argued that one's social stance is both conscious and unconsciously experienced, is inscribed in the body, felt in relation to the positioning of others and "in the form of personal attraction or revulsion". Looking specifically at middle-class habitus, I also follow Rizzo's argument that middle-class status is predominantly perceived to follow naturally from a person's family background and upbringing. She defines it, in a similar vein to Bourdieu, as a performance of which people are both unaware and simultaneously able to consciously manipulate and use to achieve certain social effects.

Anthropologist Samuli Schielke's (2015: 112) suggests that middle-classness in the context of Egypt means being at the centre of one's society and thus being the "good, decent people" (*ibid.*: 155). He argues that respect, success, a strong and ambitious personality as well as the confirmation of a good life are all dependent on proving one's ability to consume (*ibid.* 2012: 136/137). Furthermore, middle-classness means living one's life in the future around the aspiration for inclusion in the nation and demarcation from those lower in the hierarchy. Heiman et al. (2012: 20) argue that a lot of energy is dedicated to the management of being middle class, and to the calming of anxieties related to not being able to secure it. And indeed, being middle class was a highly contested terrain, and Syrians I met invested a lot of effort in maintaining or reclaiming this status. Schielke's argument is very insightful in the context of my work, nevertheless, I should add a nuance: it was not only the future that was important as a temporality in the context of class among Syrians I met in Egypt, they also engaged the past in their class narratives. The past was revitalised as a proof of their ability to be middle class, which I will elaborate on in more depth in the following chapters.

Ultimately, I understand education, profession and possessions as the relevant markers of middle-class identity among Syrian refugee men in Egypt. Predominantly, middle-classness was based on work: a man's status was defined based on his income, type of profession, productivity, inventiveness and success. Moreover, middle-classness was expressed through certain morals and values and manifested itself in forms of accepted (gendered) behaviour, certain expectations in how one should be seen and treated by others, and in people's dreams and aspirations.

## ***Men and the nation state***

The state can be described as a centrally organised body of institutions, built with the intention of control including a juridical and repressive apparatus of enforcement at its command and basis (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989: 5). Various approaches to the state coming from human geography, Middle Eastern Studies, and anthropology have illustrated the affective and emotional connections between citizens and the state (e.g. Stasiulis and Amery 2010; Mendieta 2009; Ahmed 2004). Citizenship can create a sense of security and stability, it is a “substance with heft” because of citizens’ economic and cultural rights, their right to enter and live in ‘their’ territory, their entitlements, duties, and claims to identity (Macklin 2007: 346). Eduardo Mendieta (2009: 156) describes the emotional connection between citizens and the state as defined by feelings of trust, loyalty and identification, which are in turn related to the individual’s self-respect and dignity. “Citizenship is a bundle of rights and duties, but it is also a bundle of emotions, passions, desires, in short, affect” (*ibid.*: 157/158). The loss of connection to the state, “when states of nationality fail to fulfil certain aspects of the citizenship relationship within the state” (Macklin 2007: 341) is conversely similarly burdened with emotions. Philosopher Serena Parekh (2014: 646), drawing on the ground-breaking work of Hannah Arendt, who was the first to recognise that being a refugee transforms a person’s identity, argues that the loss of citizenship means a deprivation of fundamental human qualities, namely, a reduction to bare life, a separation from the realm of humanity and reduction of one’s ability to act. While these authors do not discuss the relation of citizens to the state from a gendered perspective, it is important to keep in mind that the modern nation state had mandated a citizen as masculine (Joseph 2000: 4) and that women’s citizenship is usually of a dual nature. While women are included in the body of citizens they are usually subjected to rules, regulations and policies that are specific to them (Yuval-Davis 1997: 24). Women in many Middle Eastern countries are often only able to interact with the state through a man, be it their father, husband or another male relative (see Moghadam 2004: 147; Joseph 1991; Molyneux 1991). For the context of Syria’s personal status law, Van Eijk (2016: 77) writes: “A woman’s status is determined by her relationship to her male family members: until she marries she is connected to her paternal family and, after marriage, her status is connected to that of her husband. Nor is she regarded as a full Syrian citizen”. I consequently suggest that the state-citizen relationship does not mean the same to men and women.

The nation – a different concept from the state – can be best described as an “imagined political community”, which is both inherently limited and sovereign (Anderson 2006 [1983]: 6). The nation is conceived as a horizontal comradeship, as membership in a people or a fraternity, which can ask for sacrifices from the individual, such as willingness to die for the imagined nation (*ibid.*: 7). The roles assigned for men and women by the nation state are of different natures, disempowering and empowering men and women in different ways (Joseph 2000: 4). Engaging in a gender-sensitive analysis of the connection between a people and their nation, Joane Nagel (1998) calls terms like state power, citizenship, nationalism, dictatorship and democracy ‘masculine projects’ and defines nationalist politics as a major venue in which to realise one’s masculinity (*ibid.*: 243). Nationalism resonates with masculine cultural themes like honour, patriotism, bravery and duty (*ibid.* 251/252). Consequently, Nagel (*ibid.*: 261) wonders how the nation ‘feels’ to men and women. Based on the gendered expectations regarding defence of the country, representation and leadership, she contends that men are the protagonists within and in control of the nation while women only hold supportive roles. She concludes that the intimate link between masculinity and nationalism shapes the thinking and feeling of both men and women albeit in different ways (*ibid.*).

I suggest in this thesis that Syrian men had an ambivalent and paradoxical relationship to their state that defined them in their core. On the one hand, the state and the nation granted them access, rights and duties that it denied to women and was thus a backbone and guarantee of their dominance and control. On the other hand, however, the state, its authorities, vast security apparatus and totalitarian regime, threatened them and followed them from their childhood onwards even to their exile in Egypt and thus had an extremely destabilising effect on their manhood.

## **Chapter 2 – Of Dignity, Alienation and Humiliation**

### **or Becoming and ‘un-becoming’ refugees**

At the beginning of my fieldwork, when I had just started to get in touch with NGOs and Syrian contacts of friends of mine, I met Um Khālid, the community leader, mother of two teenagers and a recipient of aid from the UNHCR (the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). She introduced her husband to me as an activist and recipient of donations that he shared among a broad network of Syrian families. On my first visit, he met me at the *Huṣarī* mosque, a huge mosque in the centre of 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, and took me to his family’s flat. There he excused himself showing me a long list of names and addresses of Syrian families living in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City who were in need, he said, and left me with Um Khālid and her son and daughter. Um Khālid did her best to explain the situation faced by her own family and all the Syrian families her husband supported. While we had a simple meal of *manā’iṣh* and homemade *’ūzī*, she complained bitterly about the food voucher policy and the treatment she received from the UNHCR. Referring to the food vouchers, which were distributed among Syrian families in Egypt for several months by the World Food Programme under the supervision of the UNHCR, she said to me sarcastically: "Refugees are not allowed to eat chocolate". Furthermore, she felt that her personal freedom to choose which food was best for her was constrained by the rules set out by the agency: "They think they know better", she continued sarcastically.

Um Khālid’s criticism speaks volumes: she disapproved of how the UNHCR and the World Food Programme drew the line between what was considered a necessity and what was merely an item of luxury. In addition, she criticised how the agency had taken away her ability to choose what was best for her. Moreover, her critique is testimony of a middle-class lifestyle she had adapted to but had to give up in Egypt, which defined itself through consumption and modest luxury.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first engages with encounters and experiences that instilled a sense of refugeehood in Syrians I met, such as visits to the UNHCR office, worries about identity documents and papers, absence of legal protection in Egypt, and physical discomfort. The second deals with Syrian men’s strategies of distancing themselves from the refugee label. This strategy included a process of ‘othering’, in which Syrians in Europe were defined as the ultimate failure. With the ‘real’ refugee in Europe defined as the abject ‘other’, Syrian men in Egypt could establish a

hierarchy, in which they were ranked more highly because of their self-ascribed economic success and independence from government support. By calling the first part of this chapter ‘becoming refugees’, I do not aim to imply that this process is one-directional, linear and all-encompassing. Rather, I suggest that ‘becoming refugees’ is a situational transformation that can be reversed, challenged, actively confronted and rejected, as will be shown in the second part.

These discussions are preceded by an introduction to the 1951 Refugee Convention and critiques of it. In addition, I present critical scholarly commentaries on the refugee label and its impact on individuals who find themselves in a situation, in which the refugee identity is pressed upon them.

### ***Defining the refugee: The 1951 Refugee Convention***

The following lines are the most universally cited part of the basic legal definition of refugee status in international humanitarian law:

“[T]he term “refugee” shall apply to any person[...] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (Text of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

The 1951 Convention was a crucial instrument in the institutionalisation of the handling of refugees after World War II. It was established to deal with Europeans who were displaced by the war and sought resettlement and assimilation in foreign countries (Chatty 2010: 15). Since it was specifically intended to address this particular refugee situation rather than refugees as a universal phenomenon, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees was developed to resolve the geographic and temporal limitations of the Convention.

Several scholars have been critical of the definition: Political Scientist Peter Nyers (2006: xvi) argues that the Convention can be praised for replacing the classification of refugees according to their place of origin. Instead, refugees are perceived as human

beings with certain inalienable rights. Nevertheless, the aim of the Convention to use humanity as its organising principle is deceptive. Nyers (*ibid.*: 45) contends that the Convention defines the refugee by the human capacity to reason, which is held in tension with the refugee's emotion of fear that motivated their flight. Being defined by fear, Nyers (*ibid.*:46) contends, bears the risk of reducing the individual to a social outcast, incapable of showing autonomy, self-government and personal subjectivity. The Convention thus assists the process of not recognising refugees as active, visible and vocal subjects, but rather accords them invisibility, voicelessness and victimage (*ibid.*: 47). Nyers (*ibid.*: 46) stresses that, despite the Convention's aim to create a universality to the refugee condition, it defines an exclusive category that can be employed to exploit difference and reinforce hierarchies.

Likewise, anthropologist Michel Agier (2011: 11) highlights that the universalistic aim of the protection of the stateless that accompanied the Convention's definition of the refugee and the establishment of the UNHCR gradually turned into a function of control. According to political scientist Michael Barnett (2001: 252), the 1951 Convention was perceived as being necessary to ensure legal protection and rights for refugees, who were in the anomalous situation of being invisible in national and international law. At the same time, however, states were eager to guarantee their own sovereignty and limit their obligations: in order to reduce these obligations, refugee status was confined to individuals who crossed national borders and were persecuted by national governments. Feminist scholars have criticised the Convention's gender blindness that pays no attention to gender-related persecution and the asylum claims of refugee women. Rather, the Convention was developed for the prototype of an adult male, heterosexual asylum seeker (see. Smith 2016; Fiddian-Qasmiyah 2014; Edwards 2010; Bhabha 1996).

Egypt signed both the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol as well as the Organisation of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa in 1969 (Kagan 2011: 10). In the absence of a national asylum system, registration, documentation, refugee status determination and provision for assistance are conducted by the UNHCR based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Egyptian government and the UNHCR in 1954 (UNHCR 2011: 142). The country stipulated several reservations to the 1951 Convention, specifically regarding articles related to personal status, universal primary education, public relief and assistance, as well as to employment and social security (UNHCR 2003: 11 cited in Rowe 2009: 9). These reservations have enabled the government to consider refugees as foreigners, who can be excluded from several basic rights (Al-Sharmani and Grabska 2009: 459). For

instance, refugees' rights to employment fall under domestic statuses applicable to foreigners in general and require sponsorship by an employer, legal residence and travel documents, proof of specialised skills that do not put them in competition with Egyptian workers, HIV tests, and the payment of processing fees (Rowe 2009: 9). This means that legal employment is only accessible to the extremely small, educated elite who can meet these rigid requirements, while the vast majority of refugees in Egypt survive economically only because the Egyptian authorities have tolerated unauthorised labour (Kagan 2011: 18/19). Another challenge refugees face due to their categorisation as foreigners is the high level of rent foreigners in Egypt are expected to pay. While nationals fall under a rent-protection law, foreigners have to pay between ten to fifteen times more (Briant and Kennedy 2004: 439). A further restriction to refugee life in Egypt is the exclusion of most refugee children from state-funded education with the exception of Sudanese and, since 2012, Syrian refugee children (see Norman 2016: 34). Several community schools, mainly operated by church-based organisations try to fill this gap for refugee children of other nationalities. However, these 'refugee schools' are not accredited by the Egyptian Ministry of Education (Kagan 2011: 17).

Based on an agreement signed in 1954, the UNHCR conducts refugee status determination on behalf of the Egyptian government but must obtain approval from the government as to which nationalities are eligible for asylum (Norman 2015: 85). Consequently, an asylum seeker entering Egypt must register with the UNHCR for protection and eligibility for assistance. The individual then receives the 'yellow card' – the proof of asylum-seeking intent that enables the person to stay in Egypt under the protection of the UNHCR until a refugee status determination interview is scheduled. With the 'yellow card', one needs to register with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and receives a residence permit that must be renewed every six months at the respective city hall (Ayoub and Khallaf 2014: 9). Even though refugees can stay indefinitely and have access to residence permits from the government, local integration is difficult and naturalisation impossible. Repatriation and resettlement are considered the only permanent solutions for refugees in Egypt (Kagan 2011: 26).

### ***Labelling and internalisation of the refugee category***

I now turn to scholarly engagement with the term ‘refugee’ and its impact on individuals who find themselves in a situation in which the refugee identity is stamped upon them, in order to embed the analysis of the encounters of Syrians with the category.

Refugee studies scholar Roger Zetter (1991: 40) argues that there is a need to scrutinise not just the label ‘refugee’, but also the process of labelling including “stereotyping, conformity designation, identity disaggregation and political/power relationships”. Labelling is a process of delinking and replacing the individual identity with a stereotypical one, and the transformation of the individual story into a case that is part of a wider category. On the part of the labelled, the process of labelling involves accepting external control, since silent conformity with the stereotype is required (*ibid.*: 44). Aiming at analysing the meaning and consequences of the refugee status for the individual, anthropologist Liisa Malkki’s (1995: 496) classical work shows that the term ‘refugee’ often conceals the variety of socioeconomic statuses and personal histories of the people who are defined by it. She argues that the elaboration of legal refugee status into a social condition or a moral identity does not occur in an automatic or predictable way. Instead, people come to define the meaning of being a refugee differently depending on the reality they face. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong (2003) focuses on power relations involved in the shaping of refugees and citizens in the US. She argues that ‘refugees’ are subjects to a series of determining codifications and administrative rulings that govern how “they should be assessed and treated, and how they should think of themselves and their actions” (*ibid.*: 16). Basing her argument on Foucault, she stresses that refugees are both subjected to objectifying modes of knowledge and power and engaged in self-making by struggling against imposed knowledges and practices. Likewise, anthropologist Ilana Feldman (2012: 388) stresses that “people live their lives in part through the categories in which they fall”. In the case of Palestinians, she observes that the legal definition of the ‘refugee’ creates a discursive and material framework for action and opportunity, but might simultaneously function as a source of constraint. The association with refugeeness translates concurrently both into the absence of rights, such as the right to citizenship and homeland, and into access to rights, for example rights to relief and recognition, as well as political possibility and acknowledgement of Palestinian national loss (*ibid.*: 398). In a similar vein, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyah and Yousif Qasmiyah (2010: 295) argue, drawing on Boal’s term of the ‘spect-actor’, that ‘refugees’

do not merely observe what frames their lives but actively engage in and transform the discourses that surround them.

Like Feldman, several scholars refer to the double-edged characteristic of the refugee label: its strategic usefulness on the one hand, and its constraints and stigmatising potential on the other. Sociologist Bernadette Ludwig (2013: 6) conducted research among Liberians in the US. She argues that people who were forced to leave their home country may identify as refugees given its legal and material advantages in the host country, while simultaneously rejecting the stigmatising label because it enforces a constant negotiation with a painful past. Social anthropologist Marita Eastmond (2011: 289) indicates that Bosnians in Sweden rejected the refugee label because they felt it was generalising and stigmatising, and did not acknowledge their professional qualifications and social status. They contested the implication of being a victim, which they perceived as being linked to the refugee status, and aimed to accentuate instead competence and motivation to work. However, Eastmond (*ibid.*: 290) also describes how the refugee label has certain advantages and was used strategically. In addition to the simultaneous usefulness and stigmatising capacity of the category, both case studies reinforce the potential of the refugee marker to overshadow the individual's other identities and characteristics and its ability to deny agency. Refugee status can thus be experienced in a variety of ways, as protection or constraint or as both enabling and restricting at the same time. For this reason, the meaning of refugee status as an experiential category in a specific context cannot be taken for granted and requires in-depth empirical inquiry (Malkki 2002: 358).

Based on the literature briefly introduced here, I understand the category 'refugee' for the following analysis as a definition and a marker of identity that has legal, material and symbolic implications. Through the dynamic, contradictory, and not always consensual process of labelling, one 'becomes' rather than 'is' a 'refugee'. The meaning of 'refugeeness' – the state of being a refugee – in a specific social context is furthermore determined by individual agency.

### ***'Becoming' a refugee: the encounter with the UNHCR***

Coming back to the ethnographic vignette introduced at the beginning of this chapter, I turn to Um Khālid's experiences with the UNHCR, perceiving them as markers that made her become a refugee. Not only was Um Khālid upset about the agency's definitions of

necessary items for refugees, she also accused the UNHCR of nepotism, favouritism, lying and accepting bribes. Her husband and her son wrote a letter of complaint in December 2013 about the UNHCR regional office in Cairo addressed to the UNHCR headquarters in Geneva that was signed by several Syrian families. The statement criticised the head of the UNHCR regional office in Egypt for publicly stating that the UNHCR would provide Syrians in Egypt with a large amount of money, which, according to the writers and signatories of the complaint, was not only false but also led to a decline in financial support by other donors. The group had already protested in front of the UNHCR office in November 2013, holding posters, one of them saying: "*Lā aḥad mas'ūl 'an al-lājī'iṭen al-sūryūn ghayr al-mufawadiyya al-sāmiya faqat*" (No one is responsible for the Syrian refugees except the UNHCR).

Um Khālid told me that even though the group received a formal response from the UNHCR office, nothing changed and their demands were not met. What she described signifies both a belief in the UNHCR as the entity legitimately responsible for Syrian refugees and the group's identification with this category. The statement printed on the poster addressing neither Egypt nor Syria, but demanding the UNHCR's protection for Syrian refugees resonates with Hannah Arendt's (1973) classic analysis of the refugee as a 'rightless' person, facing the nation state, who has to seek protection elsewhere. Being excluded by the host country because of their status as non-citizens, refugees continue to exist in relation to entities other than the state, such as the UNHCR or NGOs, in order to satisfy their material needs and to have an identity (Parekh 2014: 654). That the group of Syrians made the effort to protest in front of the UNHCR office and that they filed a complaint shows that there was an initial trust in the agency, which Um Khālid and the signatories however lost when the response by the UNHCR was unsatisfactory and did not result in any action.

It was not the first time that the Cairo office of UNHCR was severely criticised. In 2005, a major protest and sit-in organised by Sudanese refugees in Cairo ended in bloodshed after the Egyptian police emptied the protest camp, where people were protesting about conditions in Egypt and demanding resettlement in a third country. And even before that protest, there was growing criticism of the UNHCR office in Cairo because of prolonged waiting periods and non-transparent and biased procedures (Rowe 2009: 7/8).

Um Māzin, who was introduced to me by Um Khālid, was also dependent on support from the UNHCR and the World Food Programme. She belonged to one of the

families that were on Abū Khālid’s list because her husband could not find work in Cairo due to his advanced age and poor health. Neither of their two children could support their elderly parents: their daughter had moved to Spain with her husband ten years earlier, where they were facing a constant challenge to provide for their three daughters; and their son, who lived with them in Egypt, was still a student of dentistry managing to continue his studies because he had found a sponsor. Um Māzin described how the UNHCR staff had come to their flat to conduct a needs assessment and asked her if and how often she and her family brushed their teeth, whether they ate fruits regularly, and if they had a garbage bin. She was appalled by the humiliating nature of the questions and by their implications. She also showed me the food vouchers, stored safely in a shelf of the cupboard in the living room, which she could use to buy basic groceries, such as rice, pasta, oil and sugar. However, she was not allowed to buy detergents, shampoo or body lotion with them.

Um Māzin, who always stressed that they had lived a luxurious life in Syria, felt restricted by the food vouchers, which implied to her that she could not make reasonable food choices, could not buy what she perceived as necessary, and did not know what was best for her and her family. As suggested by Zetter (1991: 44), Um Māzin became one of many, a faceless part of a bigger group that could be judged and managed according to stereotypes created about them. Likewise, Malkki (1996: 378) states that refugees stop being specific persons and as “universal woman”, “universal man” or “universal child”, they become pure victims. Furthermore, Um Māzin’s experience with the UNHCR echoes Julie Peteet (2005: 76) in her ethnography in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, when she describes the inscription of the refugee status on the individual’s body and the subjective transformation into a docile recipient of food aid through rations.

Another time, I accompanied Um Māzin to Muhammad Mahmoud hospital, as she needed treatment urgently, since her gum was extremely inflamed. At Muhammad Mahmoud hospital, Syrians could receive medical treatment subsidised by the UNHCR, which had an office right next to the hospital’s entrance. According to information Um Māzin had heard, the UNHCR or Caritas would cover most of the cost for medical treatment in Muhammad Mahmoud hospital. However, in the UNHCR office that was only identifiable by a hand-written sign saying UN, she was told that UNHCR would only contribute 100 LE to the treatment she needed and that Caritas only operated in Alexandria. After asking her son’s opinion, Um Māzin decided to go back to 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, where she hoped to find a Syrian dentist who would accept payment in small instalments.

A couple of weeks later, I went with Māzin to the UNHCR office in Zamalek, where he intended to register as an asylum seeker. He and his family had the right to reside in Egypt because he was enrolled as a student at an Egyptian university. However, since he was close to graduation, their residency would expire soon. If he wanted to work as a dentist in Egypt, he needed to be a specialist registrar for a year. His university offered this training, but he would need to pay 200 Dollars per month and his prospects of practising in Egypt afterwards were not promising. Hence, he hoped that through finally applying for asylum with the UNHCR, he would have the chance to be resettled at some point and to take the training abroad. When we approached the office, a security guard stepped in our way refusing to let us enter. He said that Māzin would need to call the office's hotline first to request an appointment. This was in contradiction to what Māzin had heard, namely, that registration for asylum seeking did not require an appointment. Additionally, there was a display case next to the office door, in which documents in English and Arabic explained the procedures. One of the documents clearly stated that 'new registration for asylum seeking' was possible at the office without requesting an appointment in advance. The security guard explained coldly that procedures had changed and that, according to the new rules, Māzin would need to call the hotline first. Eventually, a UNHCR caseworker left the office to speak to Māzin and other people, who had gathered in front of the door because they had been denied entrance by the security guard, explaining that the new rules required everyone to make an appointment via the hotline. After this experience, Māzin did not speak about seeking asylum anymore thinking instead of alternatives to leave Egypt for a third country.

Both encounters with the UNHCR left Māzin and his family feeling helpless, ignored and humiliated. Rules and procedures were changing constantly which led the family to feel that the UNHCR was unreliable and indifferent to their situation. In both cases, the family had to seek alternative solutions for their problems.

### ***Lack of protection through documents and loss of contact with the state***

For many Syrians I met in Cairo another marker of their refugee status was their constant worry about their papers and whether the Egyptian authorities would accept them. They were concerned about documents they needed to enrol their children at school, whether their Syrian driver's licence would be recognised by the Egyptian police, and about their Syrian identity documents in case they were about to expire. Their anxiety was

exacerbated by the fact that the only establishment that could provide them with these various documents was the Syrian embassy. The Syrian embassy had a very bad reputation among Syrians and most of them tried to avoid going there, if they could. It was perceived as the long arm of the regime and many horrible stories grew around it, such as arrests of Syrian visitors and forced returns to Syria. I will discuss the Syrian embassy and its role in the life of Syrian men I met in Egypt in depth in Chapter 5.

For many Syrians I met in Cairo, being a refugee was connected to doubts about documents and papers that could potentially not secure and guarantee their identity and position in Egypt. Many Syrian men talked about it with sadness, hopelessness or despair, and with their body language, tone and facial expression revealing the severity of the issue. Not so 'Abd al-Rahman, recently married and living with his wife in a small flat, who worked for an NGO supporting the Syrian opposition in Egypt. I had met him because his wife attended one of my English courses and had invited me several times to her flat. 'Abd al-Rahman got angry and raised his voice whenever he mentioned the topic of identity documents. On the evening we talked about expired passports, he was the only man in the room with his wife, his mother- and sisters-in-law, and myself seated around him. After food, he lit a cigarette, took a sip from the tea that was being served and began explaining to me the issues Syrians were facing in Egypt. The tone of his voice became increasingly aggressive, he would not listen to any interruptions, and his monologue felt like a lecture. With regards to the expiring passports, he stated:

“We are afraid here in Egypt of being stopped at any checkpoint, and if they checked our passports they would find that they are expired. We said that even if the passport was expired that doesn't mean that my identity is expired, too. The name is written in the passport and the passport has the code. Only the date is expired in the passport, so my identity shouldn't be expired, too. We demand that even in the case of an expired passport, the holder of the passport should be treated like a human being”.

His voice trembling with anger, he continued:

“Imagine that your passport is expired and you were not able to renew it, imagine they told you that you were not Magdalena and that you were a problem. No, I am not a problem! I am not a disaster! I am a human being and a human being has the right to live wherever he wants in the world!”.

'Abd al-Rahman refers to the fact that without the state's registration, approval, and acceptance the individual does not legally exist as a social person (Rabo 2011: 230). As

suggested by Yael Navaro-Yashin (2007: 81), documents, which she defines as “ideological artefacts” (*ibid.*: 88), are in specific social relations with people to whom they belong, and have the potential to provoke multiple effects in them, such as fear, insecurity or nervousness. Documents are especially prone to engender fear and uncertainty when they are absent or useless, that is, when bureaucracies leave people and things undocumented or routinely contest the validity of the existing documents (Hull 2012: 258).

In addition to his comments about documents, ‘Abd al-Rahman took up another theme: the right to have rights based on his humanity, which he continued to describe in the following way:

“We have the right as people and from the principle of humanity to be treated with respect in any country in the world, to be provided with a living, a place to live, and to be provided with a good life. An Egyptian official might say: ‘I can't provide these things to my people!’. This is right, but at least provide me with what you provide your people. You give your people an identity card and a passport. You protect your people, so why don't you protect me too?”.

‘Abd al-Rahman’s words resonate with anthropologist Ruba Salih’s (2013: 83) observation that Palestinian refugees she worked with in Lebanon called into question that rights were only accessible for those who were citizens of the country they lived in. Criticising this restricted access to rights, they expressed a different political imagination in which their humanity, and not their belonging to a nation state, granted them access to full rights and to political life (*ibid.* 2018). Likewise, ‘Abd al-Rahman’s experience of refugeeness leaves him critical of the political order, in which, he, as a refugee, does not find a place for himself that has any dignity and security. Similarly, Mustafa told me in a tone and attitude that left no space for disagreement: “No, I am not a refugee. I am living my life. It’s my country. It’s one earth. God created me on this earth, not in Syria. In Quran, it is written that the earth is for all the people”. Like ‘Abd al-Rahman, Mustafa relates his humanity and access to rights not to the nation state but to his humanity and to the bigger principles of religion.

Coming back to ‘Abd al-Rahman’s account, it additionally proves that refugeeness holds the potential to shake the core of one’s (legally recognised) being and thus threatens one’s ability to build self-confidence on the fact that one has the right to be in this world, to exist, and to claim political subjectivity. Again and again in this thesis, the topic of a man’s relation with his nation state comes up and ‘Abd al-Rahman’s

narrative is the first implication of the intimate connection that exists between men and their state, and the furious effort that is required to reclaim one's selfhood and identity if this core relationship is disturbed.

It was not only the expression of critique and worries about expiring documents that alluded to the heightened relevance of papers in the context of refugeehood, but also the procedure of filling in documents that I witnessed several times. While the struggle with papers is clearly not exclusive to refugees, it seems that being a refugee in Egypt nevertheless intensified the disputes with the authorities and increased the amount of paperwork. Most Syrian families I met were constantly thinking about solutions for their situation and filling in various applications for scholarships, resettlement or family reunions. I sensed that the effort to manage bureaucratic hurdles often evoked uncertainty, unrealistic hope and fear, which were all related to the question of whether the effort would be rewarded. Once, I helped Layla, a widowed mother of two children, to fill in documents to apply for a family reunion with her son who had managed to gain asylum in Sweden. Layla felt extremely vulnerable with no male provider and protector in the household. She had tried to find work as a secretary in Egypt but was not working at the time I met her. She was worried about her daughter, who was studying sociology and had experienced sexual harassment several times on Cairo's streets. Layla's cousin and his family, who were her closest contacts and support in Cairo had been accepted for resettlement to Germany and were about to leave. Hence, Layla's situation was about to worsen. Despite the hardship she faced, the chances that the family reunion would be successful were minimal given that her son was over eighteen years old. Nevertheless, we filled in the documents required by the Swedish embassy meticulously, as if this alone could convince the authorities. I was seated on the couch with a fan directed at my face and Layla, who did not speak English, sat next to me looking over my shoulder all the time I was writing, trying to control how I filled in the papers and making sure that I did not lose focus. She did not allow her daughter, who spoke basic English, to fill in the documents, but at the same time she had difficulty trusting me, an outsider, with this important task.

I also filled in documents together with Muhannad, the student of dentistry who had founded an NGO offering support for Syrian refugees. In contrast to Layla, who was desperate to leave Cairo because of her extremely challenging situation, Muhannad did not need to leave Egypt. He lived quite comfortably in Cairo and enjoyed his life in all its aspects. His father, who had worked in the Gulf for several years, had opened a cosmetics shop in 6th of October City and was able to pay for his sons' fees at private

universities in Cairo. In his free time, Muhammed was busy promoting the work of his NGO meeting journalists, university deans and potential foreign funders. When we filled in documents together, he sat me at the desk of his office in the NGO, on which he had put a golden name plate with his name preceded by the title ‘Doctor’, which, in fact, he did not hold. He mainly needed my assistance for the fine-tuning of various applications to workshops, conferences and scholarships abroad. He was keen to convey a certain picture of himself and the NGO he had founded and gave me clear instructions on how to phrase things. Being a Syrian in Egypt came in handy for some applications, because it allowed him to express his political awareness and display his human side, by highlighting his activism for other Syrians through his NGO.

Overall, I contend that documents were highly important items in the everyday lives of Syrians in Egypt, had the potential to evoke various emotions and were entangled with refugeeness. Which emotion was triggered, however, was dependent on the individual’s personal situation, vulnerability and political consciousness during displacement.

### ***The encounter with the Egyptian authorities***

For Abū Walīd, falling into the refugee category meant not having legal assistance and being excluded from the right to be protected from crime. The father of two boys was regularly picked up at his workplace by a police officer in plainclothes and taken to the police station, where he was kept and beaten until he paid a huge bribe. I heard about Abū Walīd’s fate because his wife attended one of the English courses I offered in a nursery for the mothers of the children (I described the difficulties of our encounter in the introduction).

Abū Walīd had come to the attention of the police officer when he had tried to open a sweetshop in the area and the police regularly came to check if he had the required licences. The police officer eventually figured out that Abū Walīd was victim to his ill will, because no one felt responsible to protect him. This led to several visits to Abū Walīd’s workplace, where the officer entered in civilian clothes and took him to the police station. There, the officer applied different strategies, accusing him of being a terrorist or a criminal and eventually settling on the fact that Abū Walīd had no official work permit. In fact, Abū Walīd only had the student residence for his family because his sons were going to school in Egypt (which did not give him official permission to work). Any

attempt to counter the blackmail was useless, since the policeman threatened that if he did not pay the bribe he would be thrown out of Egypt. The visits became more frequent and Abū Walīd became more afraid that one day he would not be able to pay the bribe and the police officer would then take him to the Syrian embassy, where he would be sent back to Syria and killed.

When Abū Walīd asked a lawyer at the UNHCR to help him, the lawyer only requested the number of Abū Walīd's file at the police station. Obviously, there was no file because the blackmail happened on an individual, arbitrary basis. When Abū Walīd tried to ask for international protection through the UN by calling the agency's hotline, he could not reach anyone in the relevant office. Then, Abū Walīd got in touch with a lawyer working for a Syrian NGO, who told him to call him the next time he was taken by the police officer. However, when this happened, the lawyer did not show up, presumably out of fear of getting into trouble himself. When Abū Walīd tried to involve an international NGO, he was told that his problem with the officer was of a personal nature. The NGO caseworker was worried that if the officer was asked by the NGO law department to stop abusing Abū Walīd, he would seek revenge. Even though the caseworker tried his best to help Abū Walīd, he felt helpless vis-à-vis the comprehensive power of the police officer. The only advice the caseworker could give him was to find a job in another area of Cairo, where the police officer could not find him.

The experience of being victim to a police officer's malevolence and the lack of legal support are surely not exclusive to Syrians in Egypt. Indeed, large numbers of Egyptians themselves have been regularly subjected to police violence, arbitrary arrests and forced disappearances (see Hamzawy 2017; Abdelrahman 2015; HRW 2015; Ismail 2006). However, I argue that Abū Walīd's specific vulnerability lies in his extreme fear of being sent to the Syrian embassy or back to Syria – an outcome of his status as a refugee, in addition to the financial and personal pressure applied by the police officer.

### *An embodied experience*

Several times when I met Syrian men and women in Egypt, I got the impression that displacement was also experienced and exhibited physically. Qutayba, who came to Egypt as a student together with his family, but soon after his arrival managed to find work in an international cultural institute as an IT specialist, told me during our first meeting how offended and embarrassed he was when a foreign female friend wanted to

pay for their drinks because he was a refugee. Even when he recalled the situation, I could feel his unease about being considered poor because of the association of his nationality with refugeehood and of refugeehood with poverty. Likewise, when I met Urwa for tea and *argīle* right after he had tried to renew his visa in the crowded *Mugamm'a*, he told me that he felt that his chest was about to explode. He hugged himself tightly, saying that he felt pain inside because of the problems that the Egyptian authorities and their bureaucracies caused him. Khālid once described to me that he thought of being a refugee as an "injury inside" that he recognised in himself and in people around him. Despite the presence of this injury, he said: "no one speaks about it, not even with close contacts".

'Abd al-Rahman, whose anger I could feel as I listened, voiced several emotions, such as humiliation, despair and hopelessness in relation to displacement:

"If the contract of my flat is expired and I have given 2,000 or 3,000 LE as a deposit and the owner refuses to give it back to me - what shall I do? I have a problem in my homeland so I left, but they [the Egyptians] think that they have humiliated me out of my country. The principle of humanity says: this man left his country and he lost his family and he is in a bad psychological condition. This man needs a lot of care more than anyone else. They [the Egyptians] do the opposite. I am really surprised of the treatment in the neighbouring countries and in the countries that have accepted refugees. This kind of treatment forces the Syrians and Palestinians who came from Syria to leave through the sea. Some people say that they have no problem in drowning and dying in the sea as long as they are leaving this country because they can't live in it anymore. Death has become easier than staying in the country. Some people left Syria to Jordan and from Jordan to Egypt and left Egypt via the sea. Some other people left from Syria to Jordan and then to Algeria and then to Libya. Some people also left to Sudan. What makes a person take such a huge risk? It is a risk of life like suicide. I will jump from this height. Maybe I will die, and maybe I will survive".

In addition to feeling pain and discomfort, several Syrian women I met explained that living in Egypt had diminished their beauty. One of these was Nūr, who was in her late thirties, unmarried, lived with her brother in a well-off area in Cairo and worked for an Egyptian agency. She was planning to move to Europe to study for her Masters and was busy applying for scholarships in her free time. We met regularly at her place where she cooked for us and I contributed desserts. Watching *musalsalāt* (soap operas) while eating, we waited until her brother went to his room before we started chatting about various

topics, such as the Egyptian lifestyle compared to the Syrian one, beauty salons, work and the future. Nūr could not imagine staying in Egypt. She was eager to leave because she felt that Egypt did not contribute to her well-being and among other issues, it had decreased her beauty. She told me sadly that since she had arrived in Cairo, her hair had become thin, dull and dry, and she had it cut short.

Likewise, Layla said that since the departure of her son, who had spent eight days on a boat travelling to Italy, her face had grown old because of her grief and worries. She said she used to have a youthful face and that no one believed that she was a mother in her forties with two children. However, she felt that in Egypt, due to her son's departure, her face had aged and had become wrinkled. Another time, I was sitting together with a group of Syrian women. Suzanne had invited us to her parents' home and we were drinking the coffee she had prepared and eating fruits she offered us. One of the women passed around an *argile*. During our conversation, we started speaking about the situation of Syrians in Egypt. Suzanne's friend Hayfa' spoke up and described vividly how the insults she received on Egyptian streets made her feel. She explained by pointing to her arm, that she could sense it all over her body when Egyptians shouted *lagī'a* (refugee) or *zibāla* (garbage) at her. At the beginning, none of the Syrians had a thick skin, she continued to explain, so it took them a while to adapt and overcome their fear.

For Um Bāsim, being a refugee in Egypt was less related to loss of beauty, and more to an increase in physical pain and illness. She had to be the main provider for her family – her husband, two sons and one daughter - since her husband had lost all his savings when he tried to do business in Egypt with several partners, who eventually cheated him out of his money. Um Bāsim vividly recalled the day her husband found out that his last project was not viable and that he had been tricked and robbed of his investment yet another time. "He didn't speak for three days", she remembered tearfully. Ever since, her husband barely talked, did not seem to hear properly, was oblivious of his surroundings and easily irritated. He repeatedly said that he wished to die. Um Bāsim took her husband to the doctor but he could not diagnose anything. Having lost its main provider, the family struggled to survive and Um Bāsim, after having sold her gold jewellery, tried to establish a business at home as a hairdresser together with her daughter. Once, when I visited her, she showed me a huge plastic bag filled to the brim with ointments and tablets. She explained that she needed the medication to cure the various forms of pain she suffered all over her body. Sometimes, the pain in her hands, arms and neck was so strong that she could not work for days.

The body plays an important role in various scholarly works dealing with forced displacement. Salih (2016) observed that it was through their bodily experiences that Palestinian women were able to express the traumas they survived. Their bodies remembered and felt the pain and grief of forced displacement during the Nakba and the Naksa. Likewise, Elizabeth Coker (2004: 403) argues that undocumented southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo told stories of their traumatic past and uncertain present and future by using their bodies and the harm afflicted to them as metaphors. Social anthropologist Anne Grønseth (2011: 321) stresses that Tamil refugees in Norway embodied the experienced need for adaptation and assimilation and the absence of their familiar social and religious context, by developing lasting pain and fatigue. And Peteet calls displacement “an embodied experience” that alters the body profoundly and transforms it into an “unknown terrain that must be relearned” (Becker 1997: 81 cited in Peteet 2005: 54).

In conclusion, I argue at the end of this first section that refugeehood had various facets among Syrians I met in Egypt. It was experienced as: humiliation; worries and insecurity; dependence on institutions and entities; inability to form one’s future; risk taking; despair and hopelessness; and as pain, embarrassment, and loss of the body one used to know. In this climate, in which identity needs to redevelop around, and adapt to, these experiences and encounters of refugeehood, I suggest that masculine identity can easily be damaged by this process and requires active and conscious effort to be reinvented. I discuss the process of attempting to cure masculinity damaged by refugeehood in the following section.

### ***Defining what makes a person a refugee***

There are certain attributes associated with the ‘genuine refugee’, such as pacifism, morality, trauma, victimhood, and femininity (Griffiths 2015: 472; Pupavac 2008: 272). Other associations with the ideal refugee are neediness, lack of competence, and helplessness (Szczepanikova 2010: 466/470). Maysa Ayoub and Shaden Khallaf’s (2014) study, one of the few that deals with the situation of Syrians in Egypt, shows that by 2013, when the study was conducted, a significant number of those surveyed had not approached the UNHCR for registration. One of the reasons was hesitance about bearing the title ‘refugee’, which was loaded, in the eyes of the study’s participants, with negative connotations, such as weakness, desperation, and misery (*ibid.*: 22). This finding overlaps

with my observation that most Syrians I met had initially refused to register with the UNHCR.

During several conversations with Syrian NGO caseworkers, I was told that Syrians needed time to adapt to and accept their new situation, in which they had to bear the refugee title. Khalīl, for instance, who worked with an Egyptian NGO offering psychosocial support to refugees, described the Syrian people as “proud and rich”. Before the Syrian uprising, it was unthinkable for a Syrian to ask for help, he explained. Consequently, Syrians in exile needed time to accept their new status that was defined externally by need and poverty. Qutayba said that it was probably due to the sudden change in their life that Syrians were reluctant to apply for refugee status. Most Syrians who came to Egypt had a good life before the outbreak of the civil war and had yet to come to terms with the abrupt transformation of their lifestyle, he said. Nūr referred to the Syrians’ pride and dignity that prevented them from approaching the UNHCR when they first arrived. She explained that Syrians did not want to be treated like people who had to ask for money to survive. The reluctance to publicly admit one’s need and poverty echoes Peteet’s (2005: 127) observations that “displacement meant learning anew how to carry oneself and present oneself to others” and thus enforced the transformation of identities. Likewise, Malkki (1996: 381) stresses that refugeeness had to be interiorised as an aspect of people’s identities.

Another reason for rejecting the association with refugeeness was put forward by Abū Muhannad, the father of Muhannad who had successfully opened a cosmetics shop in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City and could pay the fees at a private university for his two eldest sons. He opposed the stigmatising refugee label because of its incompatibility with Syria’s perceived wealth and history: “Refugee is a difficult word for me. It doesn’t fit the Syrian people. We are from a rich country and we had everything. We have never been refugees before”. He assured me emphatically that he would not accept being called a refugee: “I would kill the Egyptian who says to me that I am a refugee. We have developed 6<sup>th</sup> of October City to what it is today. There was nothing here before. It is only through the Syrians that 6<sup>th</sup> of October City has become such a good place”. According to Peteet (2005: 210), self-characterisations as refugees in the context of Palestinians in Lebanon became a barometer indexing the individual’s power, dependency and vulnerability. Following her argument, Abū Muhannad could refuse to characterise himself as a refugee because of his secure economic situation and relative independence.

Abū Muḥannad's son also opposed the stigmatising refugee label. As the founder of an NGO for Syrian students, Muḥannad repeatedly mentioned that he perceived it as his mission to transform the picture of the needy, poor, victimised Syrian refugee in Egyptian society. This was the reason he and his NGO colleagues attended every event they organised or were invited to in white button-down shirts and jackets. Muḥannad explained to me that he did not only aim to prove this image outwardly to the Egyptian host population, but also wanted to instil self-confidence and self-esteem in young Syrians who had to cope with their new, externally imposed status as refugees.

Majd, a student of economics in his early twenties who worked while studying and had high ambitions for the future, stressed his initial reluctance to go to the UNHCR office. He explained that he and his mother did not want to have refugee status because of their notable family background. From our first meeting, when he assisted me in teaching an English class, I knew that his great-grandfather used to hold a key role on the political stage before Hafiz al-Asad's rule. Due to being from a family of "influential politicians and investors", as he called it, in whose footsteps he wanted to follow, he did not find it easy to reconcile his lineage with claiming asylum. What changed his mind eventually was the increasing insecurity of living in Egypt without a proper residence permit. By his being enrolled in university and being granted a student residency, Majd and his mother could eventually stay in Egypt. However, for a while, it was uncertain whether he could be enrolled into one of the Egyptian universities and thus Majd decided that it was safer to go to the UNHCR and apply for refugee status. In order to justify his decision, he said: "I don't like the idea of asylum, however, this card [the yellow card] is like a guarantee for the future, so if in the future, I need to seek asylum, I should have this card with me in order to get a visa". And Ghassān justified his registration and use of the 'yellow card' in the following way:

"Yes, I went to the UNHCR and I have the yellow card. At the beginning, we didn't want it, however, for four months we have it now. At the end, this yellow card can be useful if the father or mother dies and the children become orphans. Maybe then the UN can help them. If you have a legal problem the UN lawyer can defend you, especially if they arrest you and they want to send you back to Syria. In this situation, it is useful".

It is noteworthy that even though many Syrian men I met rejected the category for themselves and tried to escape it in their narratives, as in the case of Majd, almost all of them had eventually registered as refugees with the UNHCR. Their action thus stood in

contrast to their narratives. Ayoub and Khallaf's (2014: 22) report stresses that most Syrians in Egypt eventually did register with the UNHCR because of the changing political situation in the summer of 2013 and the consequent heightened need for protection and assistance. This rejection of the refugee marker for various reasons and simultaneous acceptance of the refugee status to guarantee one's security in Egypt echoes Peteet's (2005: 209) argument that the meaning of legal refugee status among Palestinians in Lebanon was not constant over time but shifted in accordance with the power and persistence of the Palestinian resistance movement. At times when they were empowered by the resistance movement, the Palestinians in Lebanon rejected any self-reference as refugees. However, belonging to the category eventually became a necessity in order to receive services from UNRWA (*ibid.*: 210). Similarly, Ludwig (2013: 13) observed changing uses of the refugee status over time: Liberians in New York defined refugeeness as a transient and momentary situation related to their immediate forced displacement from their home countries. Acknowledging that they were refugees at some point, they expressed success and created hierarchies based on the person's ability to leave refugee status behind and transfer into a new category, for example permanent residency. Likewise, Malkki (1995a: 158/159) observed that refugeeness was linked to a temporally bounded period. The early years in the host country were connected to social hardship and poverty and were defined as their experience of refugeeness. The improvement of one's economic situation over time was then often linked to the successful escape from the refugee label (*ibid.*: 161).

While both scholars found that refugeeness was primarily linked to early years in the host country, most Syrians I met strictly refused any identification with refugeeness when they first arrived in Egypt and only recognised and reluctantly accepted its usefulness and necessity at a later stage of their stay in exile. I argue that the initial reluctance followed by an eventual acceptation of the refugee status relates to the specificity of the Syrian case in terms of its uncertain outcome. When I conducted fieldwork, Syrians in Egypt had been displaced for no more than two years and the civil war in Syria was still ongoing. Their mindset, thinking, and planning still had one foot in Syria and they were in a position of absolute liminality, not knowing if they could return to Syria or would continue with their journey in exile.

### *Creating distance*

Having discussed why most of the Syrians I met rejected the refugee definition for themselves, I now turn to the strategies applied by several of the Syrian men to actively distance themselves from this category. I found the use of this strategy especially prominent among Syrian men who were relatively well off in Egypt, having found work and being able to live a relatively comfortable life. They clarified their personal incompatibility with the refugee marker through their ability to pay for their expenditures and their consequent independence from governmental support.

A sociological theoretical contribution that merits study in the context of proving one's incompatibility with the refugee category is the sociological work of David Snow and Leon Anderson (1987) dealing with distancing processes among homeless people. The authors base their argument on Erving Goffman's (1961) classical concept of 'role distancing'. They argue that through 'identity talk' the homeless people they met consciously created a distance between themselves, others in the same situation, and the institutions that offer services to homeless people. Based on the assumption that self-worth is connected to "the imputed social identities of one's associates" (Snow and Anderson 1987: 1349), the authors found that homeless people engaged in role distancing in the form of showing one's lack of commitment or attachment to the role ascribed to them from the outside, in order to keep their self-worth. I argue that my participants frequently and actively engaged in the creation of distance between themselves and what they perceived as a stigmatising status held by other Syrians, but which did not fit with their personality, background and lifestyle. The concept of 'role distancing' can be combined with Michael Kimmel's (1994: 126) argument that "masculinity is defined more by what one is not rather than who one is". Syrian men actively created their identity by referring to what they were not, namely beneficiaries of governmental support, purposeless, and unable to ensure their own survival. It is also helpful to consider R. W. Connell's (1995) concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' and her argument that masculinities are actively produced through the use of resources and strategies available in a given milieu (1998: 5).

One of the Syrian men I met who was relatively well-off in Egypt was Maḥmūd. I knew him from my semester abroad in Damascus in 2009. He used to be a tour guide in Syria and managed to work in this profession in Egypt due to his vast network among independent backpackers, his ability to speak four languages, his knowledge of the

Middle East, and his self-developed tours and information booklets. When I asked him whether he felt like a refugee he answered: “On the one hand, we can say refugee because I am afraid of going back to Syria, so I can be considered a refugee. At the same time, however, I am working and I sometimes help if I can, and in this case, I don’t feel like a refugee”. Several times, Mahmūd gave me money for the Syrian families in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City about whom I had talked with him. The ability to work and provide for oneself as a marker of incompatibility with refugee status is even more pronounced in Hānī’s narrative. He was a student of dentistry, who came to Egypt in 2010 to study and returned in 2011 after the Egyptian uprising only to experience the beginning of the revolution in Syria, when he came back to Egypt. He lived by himself in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City.

“I don’t feel like a refugee because the government doesn’t pay for me and there is a difference between someone who is supported by the government and someone who doesn’t receive anything. I am not like this. I am working and I pay the rent and I pay for my life. I don’t need the government to help me”.

Hānī’s account suggests that being an independent agent, who can lead and control his life, is incompatible with the refugee identity. A similar line of thought was present in many other conversations: accepting external help was generally conflated with being a refugee and hence rejected for as long as possible. Several case workers employed in NGOs that assisted refugees described how most Syrian families were ashamed to show publicly that they required support and were consequently hesitant not only to register with the UNHCR, but also to approach NGOs for assistance.

Besides work and independence from support, Mahmūd’s and Hānī’s statements include another significant aspect that was taken as a proof of their personal incompatibility with the title of the refugee: they had a purpose in life. Mahmūd worked as a tour guide and Hānī was a university student. Likewise, Ghassān’s statement asserts that having a purpose in life could not be aligned with refugeeness: “The people who are going by boats to Europe can be considered refugees, but if you are a student and you want to study I think that they will accept you as a student. Then you will work hard and you will be useful for their country”. Ghassān, who was a final year student in high school aiming to study pharmacy, created a hierarchy between the people who migrated by boat, who could not easily escape the refugee definition over time, and a student, who would eventually be useful to the host country. Additionally, he relates refugeeness to migration to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea. This needs to be placed in context: all the Syrians I met in Cairo had travelled to Egypt by plane. This implies that they had the financial

capability to pay for a ticket for themselves and their families, and that their trip was direct and relatively safe, mainly departing from Damascus airport and arriving without further interruption in Cairo. Ghassān disparages Syrians in Europe because of the means of transportation they used to travel to the host country, which indicates despair and the inability to choose a safer option for oneself and one's family.

In a similar vein, Maḥmūd once told me: “Now you can read on Facebook that Syrians differentiate based on how they came to Europe. They say: ‘You came by boat but we came by plane!’”. The classification he refers to is most likely based on the fact that travelling to Europe via plane was only possible if one had a visa in advance or was chosen to resettle by the UNHCR. The judgement of the individual’s means of transportation thus seems to relate to one’s ‘legality’ in the host country and the ‘legality’ of one’s journey.

Ascribing status to a person based on their means of transportation to a new country is not unique. In a process of distancing themselves from the newcomers and in order to reassert their national belonging, American identity and loyalty, the Arab diaspora in Detroit engaged in a process of stigmatisation of the newly arrived ‘others’. They defined those, who seemed most likely to conform to the stereotypes of Arab Muslims prevalent in the American society after 9/11, as immigrants, temporaries, illegals or ‘boaters’ (Howell and Shryock 2011: 79/80).

The strategic importance of stressing one’s independence from government support, one’s success in the Egyptian labour market, and the emphasis of one’s incompatibility with the refugee definition may explain why those Syrian men who were in a good economic position in Egypt often immediately clarified what brought them to Cairo in our first encounter. They mentioned that they came to Egypt for economic reasons; like businessman Fāris who stressed that he was sent by his boss in Syria to become the supervisor of a local branch of the company in Egypt. Others mentioned immediately that they came to study. Correspondingly, Syrian men with work and relative security in Cairo stated that they would only go to Europe to pursue an education or a specific career. Nūr’s brother Dāwūd, for instance, a man in his mid-thirties who had found work as a consultant in an Egyptian organisation and had just got engaged when I met him, described to me what would have motivated him to go to Europe:

“I tried to go to Europe through scholarships and I tried to apply with some organisations like the UN but I got rejected. There are ideas that you can improve and develop in order to use them later to return to the homeland, as generations,

as governments, as a society. I wanted to study conflicts that happened around the world during a Master's programme”.

The focus in Dāwūd's narrative is clearly on a legal entry into Europe and a purpose for his stay that would even benefit Syrian society in the post-conflict era. Furthermore, the discussion revolving around one's personal incompatibility with the refugee label because of one's educational aspiration or background reiterates the model of the modern middle-class man, which, according to historian Keith Watenpaugh (2006), emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Eastern Mediterranean ruled by the Ottoman Empire. He argues that the modern, middle-class man “employed not physical action but intellectual action; ultimately, he would be measured by political, social and commercial achievement in the public sphere rather than by considerations of birth and religious affiliation” (*ibid.*: 89). Being a modern middle-class man or woman meant reaching out for education, cultural and social improvement as well as political awareness (*ibid.*: 90/91). The focus on one's incompatibility with the refugee label based on one's profession, educational aspirations or achievements and hard work thus suggests masculinity based on a certain class consciousness.

The resources available to Syrian men in Egypt which they can use to produce masculinity are their various experiences of displacement and differing successes in finding work and establishing a life. Many affluent Syrian men I met used the currency of managing one's life upon displacement to create a hierarchy between themselves and others, labelling those, who in their perception were the least successful, namely the one who takes a boat to Europe, as ‘refugee’.

### *Image and perception of Europe*

Based on the idea that being a refugee was contradictory to successful participation in the labour market, many Syrians, who were in a privileged situation, stated that only the economically successful Syrian newcomers stayed in Egypt, while those who could not settle and make ends meet, left for Europe. Syrians in Europe were described by Abū Muhan nad as coming “from a lower-class background”, and by Muhan nad as “a burden on society” and “lazy”. In contrast, Syrians who stayed in Egypt were defined by Būlus as “rich and hardworking”. With these narratives, my interlocutors not only created a distance from, but also identified themselves as superior to, Syrian refugees in Europe

based on their attributed hard work, class background and wealth. They actively de-classed Syrians in Europe.

It is worth looking at what Europe meant to Syrian men in order to examine their negative opinions of Syrians who fled there and to embed these statements in context. Over the course of my fieldwork, I realised that Europe occupied an ambivalent status: some Syrians praised it for its development and humane treatment of refugees, others despised it for its cultural distance from the Middle East. Most Syrians I met believed that life in Europe for Syrians arriving as refugees was good and certainly better than the treatment Syrians experienced in Egypt and the wider Middle East. ‘Abd al-Rahman said:

“They [people who made it to Europe] have a good life there which meets the human standards and they are happy. We are always in touch with our friends who travelled via the sea to Europe or got resettled by the United Nations. They arrived in Germany, France, the Netherlands, or Sweden. They are comfortable there”.

‘Abd al-Rahman’s in-laws were about to resettle to the Netherlands after his wife’s brother, who was only thirteen years old when he made the journey via the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, had applied for *lam al-shamal* (family reunion) in Holland. ‘Abd al-Rahman’s wife could not imagine being left behind with her husband in Egypt once her whole family had gone to the Netherlands. Consequently, she decided to embark on the journey to Europe on her own with the aim of applying for *lam al-shamal* after her arrival in the Netherlands in order to bring her husband to Europe, too.

Often, I heard idealised assumptions about the treatment refugees would receive in Europe, which was clearly based on rumours and speculations. Said Abū ‘Alī:

“As refugees in Europe our situation would be much better. Here we don’t get anything as refugees. In Europe, there is money, they give us houses and 300 Dollars. The Syrians in Europe are refugees just like we are, but we are underprivileged. No one knows how to deal with us. They don’t care for us. This is not my country”.

I met Abū ‘Alī when I volunteered in an Egyptian organisation providing aid to refugees. He and his wife lived in one of the poorest areas in Cairo and he complained that the Egyptian authorities would not provide him with basic services and that he could not expect any support from the Egyptian police if he was in trouble. He used to work as a lawyer in Syria but was unemployed when I met him. He had worked in several jobs, such as a cashier or a chauffeur for a couple of months after his arrival in Egypt but could not continue because of bad health. While Abū ‘Alī had an overly positive image of the

reality for refugees in Europe and contrasted it with the unfair treatment in Egypt, some Syrians, like Wasīm, doubted the rumours they heard:

“They [the Syrians] started to talk with their friends in Europe: ‘I am happy here and I have a house and a salary!’ So, the people started to think about Europe as a paradise. No one arrives there and shares the real situation, only very few people. When people go there, their main goal is to improve their lives and the second topic is the question of education. Education is very important for them”.

In addition to the widespread belief that Europe treated refugees well, Syrians talked frequently about the stable political and economic situation they believed they would find in Europe, and about its considerable development, wealth and progress.

In contrast to these assumptions, I also heard that European countries were perceived as the countries of the *kufār* (unbelievers), where morals and values were degraded, and people did not care for each other. Europe was associated with sexual relationships before or outside marriage, promiscuity, sexual laxity, and a lack of morals and code of ethics. Frequently, I was asked by Syrians who had relatives in Europe or planned on going to Europe themselves, if and how the governments in Europe would interfere in the nuclear family’s life: Would the child be taken away by the state authorities if it was beaten once? How much parental authority was acceptable? Does the voice and signature of a woman as wife and mother count as much or more than the husband’s or father’s? Can a woman decide family-related issues on her own without consulting her husband? Can she travel on her own?

Abū Muḥammad, Layla’s cousin, who was preparing himself and his family for resettlement to Germany, had several questions and concerns regarding his prospective life there and told me the following:

“If you go to Europe you should assimilate and accept new things. You will need to spend at least one year studying the language. You will waste one year only for getting a language certificate. I wasted years of my life just because of this. It’s better to study German in Syria and then go to Germany immediately. It’s better than staying in Germany for two years doing nothing but studying the language. I am really upset that I will go to Germany and lose two years of my life doing nothing but studying the language”.

Here, living in Europe is clearly associated with a standstill in one’s personal development and with giving up autonomy over one’s personal plans and preferences in exchange for asylum and the obligations that come with it. Likewise, Qays, the founder

of an aid organisation for Syrians in Cairo, was extremely critical of the idea of leaving the Middle East for Europe. He spoke in *fusha* to me, presumably to make his words sound more sophisticated, educated and convincing:

“If I were in Germany, I would get a salary. There, you could work and your wife could work as well at the minimum (*inta hunāka kunt tastaqīt an ta ‘ysh wa ta ‘amal zawqatik fī al-ḥudūd al-dunyā*). In Germany, there are people who prefer to just take money, so they don’t need to worry about anything. The Egyptian society is close to the Syrian society. It’s better that the Syrian stays in societies that are close to our societies (*fa-kān yufaḍḍil baqa al-sūrī fī mujtama ‘āt qarīb min mujtama ‘ātnā*). The Western society for us is a strange and different society. Europe and the US are strange for us. It’s different from the Middle Eastern societies. Many Syrians left and went to Europe. I find it strange. It means that there is a social problem (*hadhā dalīl inu fī hunāka azma mujtama ‘iyya*). I don’t remember that it was said that the Germans left Germany after the war. I didn’t hear anything like that. Even if the German left the country, he decided to come back to rebuild Germany (*qarrara an yu ‘id binā’ almāniyā*”).

Qays juxtaposes the proximity of Egyptian and Syrian culture with the alienating ‘other’ culture of the West. Even though he was at times extremely critical of the Egyptian host population, in this specific context he made use of the notion of the uniting, border-crossing Arab culture. This resonates with Peteet’s (2005: 185) observation of the habit of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon of oscillating between Arabness and Palestinianism depending on its usefulness, to either express belonging to the Arab culture and history or to highlight the Palestinians’ separateness and distinction.

Furthermore, travelling to Europe evoked rejection, because in the post-2011 era Syrians were forced to leave their home country and were dealt with as refugees rather than being able to freely migrate, as suggested by Bashār, a student of dentistry living by himself in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City: “Is a civil servant working in the ministry able to live on the street for one week without water and a toilet? No! So why do I have to live on the streets? Because I am now a second-class human being (*daraja tāniya*)”. Bashār when referring to the news from Germany which went viral in the summer of 2015, when hundreds of new arrivals waited for many hours and even slept in front of LaGeSo (the State Office for Health and Social Affairs) in Berlin in order to submit their asylum applications (see Eddy and Johannsen 2015; Murray 2015). He continued: “Before 2011, no one travelled from Syria via the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The situation was good

back then. Now, I have to be scared that my children and I could get killed in my own country. That is the reason why so many Syrians flee to Europe". Angrily, he added that no country felt any responsibility towards them: not Europe nor America nor any other state.

The following narratives that classify Syrians in Europe should be read keeping in mind the general perception of Europe just described, since the value of Europe defines the image of the people seeking asylum there.

### ***Developing new masculine hierarchies***

Muhannad was not against going abroad. In fact, several times we filled in scholarship applications together because he wanted to attend summer school in the US or a conference or a language course in Europe. However, he disagreed with the rising trend in Syrians leaving for Europe via the Mediterranean Sea or the Balkan route.

"When the guy cannot find a job, cannot study and cannot find anything [in Egypt], he will think about going to Europe. In Europe, he will drink, he will eat and he will sleep. Should this be the reason to make me leave? Why? Here, I am going out, I am working, I am meeting people, and I am getting new experiences. There, I will just stay at home and I will be a '*iba'* [burden] on society.

Muhannad was also critical of the illegality of actions people accepted in order to enter Europe: "Why do you travel to Europe via the sea?", he asked, "you can apply for a scholarship and you can travel the legal way!". This echoes the theme of one's legality or 'illegality' that was brought up by Ghassān in relation to the means of transportation from Syria to Europe. Furthermore, it displays Muhannad's privileged background.

In a similar vein, Maḥmūd said in one of our conversations that Syrians in Europe had opted for an undignified treatment only to receive financial support in return. "They must feel like beggars in Europe since they are dependent on money from the government. No one admits it, but it really does something to the people. No one would have ever accepted such support in Syria. This goes against one's dignity". Just like Muhannad, Maḥmūd had thought more than once about travelling to Europe, weighing his options and trying to estimate which place could guarantee him most security, well-being and a meaningful future. He then decided that staying in Egypt was his best option. In Cairo, he could continue working and would not need to interrupt it or find a new profession

while waiting for his residency to be approved in a European refugee camp. Maḥmūd created the image of Syrians in Europe as people who should be pitied, since they had lost their former status and became the ones who were the lowest in the hierarchy, left without agency and totally dependent on help from outside. Maḥmūd thus strips refugees in Europe of their agency and arguably their manhood. The connection he draws between refugeehood and begging was also observed by McSpadden and Moussa (1993: 210) in their study of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees in North America. The beggar is usually associated with a physical handicap and consequent dependence. A person, who is physically whole and still begs is considered shameful and can only be ridiculed. Because of one's dependence on welfare and charity, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees frequently bitterly called themselves beggars.

Even though Maḥmūd was convinced that travelling to Europe was not feasible for him, he kept complaining about his life in Egypt. Once, he got in trouble with an Egyptian doorman when he wanted to withdraw money from his bank account. The Egyptian doorman, when he had found out that Maḥmūd was from Syria, made a joke about Syrian women working as prostitutes in Egypt. Angrily, Maḥmūd told him:

“If a war breaks out in your country, you will hear stories worse than this about your people. In any place in the world, if there is a war, you will even find men working in prostitution. The war makes people this way. If there was a war in Egypt, you will find more Egyptians than Syrians travelling to Europe!”

The doorman answered that he could not imagine that Egyptians would ever leave their beloved country. Maḥmūd remembered that he responded: “Yes, you will leave your country! We said the same. We said that we would never leave Syria and now we are spread all over the world!” This conversation is revealing because leaving one's country is used here to define the individual's failure and functions as a humiliating insult. The underlying theme is clearly a man's responsibility vis-à-vis his home country and his inability to prevent women from working in prostitution. Likewise, Qays judges other Syrians by using the currency of leaving or staying in a country that is culturally similar to one's country of origin.

## ***Conclusion***

This chapter has described situations and encounters in Egypt that made Syrians feel like belonging to the refugee category, such as encounters with the UNHCR or the Egyptian

authorities. In these contexts, Syrians in Egypt had to negotiate various forms of labelling. Falling into certain bureaucratic categories can sometimes offer access to resources and consequent relaxation on the part of the refugee. However, among most Syrians being identified as a refugee led to furious disentanglement of one's self from the ascribed label and its consequences.

Refugeeness was experienced as a feeling of insecurity, uncertainty, helplessness, and sometimes as anger, fear or sadness. One's identity was felt to be in question, and a feeling of being subject to others' ill will was prevalent. These aspects affected constructions of masculinity. Nevertheless, the most prominent emotions in the narratives I heard and actions I observed were dignity and pride that the Syrian men tried to keep intact by distancing themselves from the refugee category. Another constantly emerging, underlying emotion was arrogance with the consequent demarcation of those who were perceived to stand lower in the hierarchy.

This chapter then discussed Syrian men's strategies to create distance between themselves and the prototype of a 'refugee' – an emasculated phantom that they construed and that the 'refugee in Europe' embodied. Syrian men in Egypt created a hierarchy by downplaying this 'other' Syrian, who sought refuge in a Europe. I suggested that the discussion about the 'other's' refugeeess is not only a way to prove one's incompatibility with the refugee label, but is simultaneously a way of establishing proper middle-class manhood. Syrian men I met actively erected boundaries and a hierarchy based on their self-ascribed moral and economic superiority and stern discipline in contrast to the Syrian refugee's assumed laziness in Europe, and on their loyalty to the Arab world in contrast to the Syrian refugee's willingness to compromise their autonomy and lifestyle in return for governmental support in Europe.

When looking at Syrian men's negotiations of the refugee label, keeping in mind that they had just fled a brutal civil war (I will discuss memories of the conflict in more detail in Chapters 5-7), being a refugee should not be understood as a 'solution' to the violence and persecution they experienced, but rather as an extension of the insecurities they had already faced in their lives. In the following chapter, I will shed light on Syrian men's participation in the Egypt labour market as refugees and how this challenged them and, in many ways, increased their insecurity and vulnerability.

## **Chapter 3 – *Of Pride, Shame and Judgement***

### **or Claiming successful middle-class masculinity through work**

Having discussed what instilled a sense of refugeeess in Syrian men and women I met in Egypt and how men found ways to disconnect themselves from the label and from other people associated with that label, I turn in this chapter to Syrian men's experiences in the Egyptian labour market. Scholars dealing with men and masculinity have long recognised and theorised about the connection between employment and masculinity (see Connell 1995; Edwards 2006; Hearn 2001; Morgan 1992). Particularly in the context of migration and forced displacement, scholarly attention is focused on men's ability to work and remain as provider for the family. This literature suggests that men are likely to experience a crisis when they can no longer uphold their status as provider, and especially if women take over increased economic responsibilities (see Kabachnik et al. 2013; Donaldson and Howson 2009; Jaji 2009; Schrijvers 1999). Another recurrent focus targets the question of whether men and women's changing economic responsibilities and daily practices during displacement lead to the transformation of gender relations (see Brun 2000; Turner 2000). However, discussions with Syrian men about their work conditions and their perceptions of Syrian working women suggest that refugeeess, work and gender interrelated among Syrians in Egypt in a different way and do not confirm the claims in the literature. I argue that Syrian men in Egypt identified the ideal of Syrian middle-class masculinity through narratives about their own and other men's work. Where they could not uphold this status, they used strategies of de-classing and emasculation of others and referred to traditional ideals of gender relations to reinstate their manhood. I also show in this chapter that it is important for an analysis of masculinity to take into consideration men's position during their lifespan.

#### ***Working in Egypt***

As previously mentioned, Syrians who live as refugees in Egypt face difficulties finding legal employment and are thus pushed towards informal labour. There is no doubt that the economic situation of most Syrians in Egypt worsened over the years with decreasing support available from the UNHCR and through loss of savings. According to Ayoub and Khallaf's (2014: 25) study, 45.5 per cent of the respondents reported work as their only source of income while the rest depended on a combination of work, financial aid and/or

withdrawing from savings to sustain their livelihoods. Compared to other refugee groups living in Egypt, Syrians are considered advantaged because of their reputation as experienced and hard-working employees and entrepreneurs with outstanding skills in the food industry (Ayoub 2017; Ayoub and Khallaf 2014: 25). In fact, the Syrian presence in Egypt is demonstrable through the proliferation of Syrian restaurants, food shops and bakeries, and their increasing visibility in the Egyptian food sector has attracted national and international media attention (e.g. Shahine 2016; Primo 2015; Kingsley 2013). Despite this reported success of a number of Syrian restaurant managers and company owners in Egypt, Ayoub and Khallaf's (2014: 27) study and a report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2015: 20) reveal that the majority of Syrians work informally, having changed their occupation and taken up less-skilled jobs in Egypt. While a third of the respondents reported to be satisfied with their current job, those not satisfied mentioned low wages, difficult work conditions, and a mismatch between their jobs and their level of education. Moreover, work was perceived as unstable and irregular, and respondents felt they could be dismissed at any time (*ibid.*: 28).

The variety of work experiences in Egypt was reflected in the occupations of Syrians I met in Cairo. Among them, there was a chef in a Syrian fast-food restaurant, a dentist, numerous case workers in NGOs, several shop assistants, a shop manager, a housekeeper, a young man employed in IT support, primary school and language teachers, taxi drivers, and shop owners. Some had received or “bought”, as Dāwūd put it, permission to work, however, most of them worked informally. Apart from Abū Walīd, who was threatened and blackmailed by a police officer because he had no work permit, most Syrian men I met assured me that they could work in Egypt with no fear of interference by the state. Nevertheless, even if the state seemed to turn a blind eye to Syrians’ informal labour, their work conditions were mostly far from satisfactory. In the following paragraphs, I introduce the situation of several Syrian men to illustrate the challenges they faced as participants in the Egyptian labour market.

The first time I met Abū Walīd in the accessories shop, where he was a shop assistant, was on the Egyptian national holiday *shām al-nassīm* (Egyptian Spring Festival). The shop consisted of one main room packed with fashion jewellery, cosmetics, false eyelashes, scarves and stockings. To my surprised question as to why he had to work on a public holiday, he answered, “I have to work because I am Syrian”. He explained that his boss was Egyptian and demanded his presence on public holidays, that he had to work long hours and could not ask for any vacation. According to Abū Walīd, his boss knew that he, as a Syrian, could not complain. Hence, he worked thirteen hours a day for

1,500 LE per month (in 2015 this amounted to approximately 170 US Dollars). Because he and his family could not live off this income due to a monthly rent of 1,000 LE (approx. 115 US Dollars), he started offering body-piercing services in the shop and had begun attending a course in the evenings after his thirteen-hour shift. He opened a drawer in a corner of the shop to show me his piercing instruments and pointed at a discreet sign in the shop window written in English that referred to the piercing services offered. I had to promise him not to tell his wife about his second profession, since Abū Walīd was sure that she would disapprove. He explained:

“I was obligated to do another job, which my wife doesn’t know about. For my age and my situation, it is ‘ayb (shame) to do this work. My wife doesn’t know my workplace because I am working as a piercer. My wife thinks that I work with accessories only. I get a percentage for this work because I introduced it to this shop”.

Abū Walīd constantly repeated throughout our various conversations that there was no future in Egypt – neither for him and his family nor for the Egyptians. He felt overwhelmed by the fact that he could not afford education in a private school for his children and that even though both he and his wife were working, the family could barely make ends meet. He felt that he could not rely on anyone’s help, saying that he “stopped going to the UN” because he never “had an advantage through the UN” and that he had “never got used to asking people for help”.

Even though many of the Syrians I met had found work, most of them did not work in the profession they had held in Syria and their new job lacked the prestige of the previous one. An old woman, whom I met in an NGO in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City providing aid for Syrians, told me that her son used to be a trader and had his own office in Syria, while in Egypt he was employed as the office boy in an engineering company preparing tea and coffee for the other employees. Another woman shared with me that her husband was currently unemployed, but had worked as a waiter for a while and was desperate and ready to accept any kind of work in Egypt. In Syria, he used to be an accountant.

The loss of prestigious work and the inability to find a suitable job following forced displacement were themes I also discussed with ‘Abd al-Rahman. He explained:

“The situation in Egypt is more comfortable [than in Jordan]. It is possible for the man to work and go out, but unfortunately the salary is low. The Syrian teacher couldn’t find work when he came to Egypt. His wife also couldn’t find work, while they used to have a solid income in Syria, which they spend partially and

partially saved, and they had their own house there. [...] As you can see here in Egypt, there are many people, who have university degrees but they work as drivers. [...] Any man who has a family and left Syria for any other country suffers a lot because there are no jobs but there is the responsibility. He was comfortable in Syria. His big family was close to him and when he needed money he asked his brother or his friend. Now, I am in Egypt and a friend of mine is in Jordan and another one is in Libya. There was no suffering before, but now there is a huge suffering”.

He describes that in Syria, working held the promise of consumption, possession and ease of life. However, in Egypt it is an accumulation of loss of prestige, network, income and savings, living in a country with a high unemployment rate, and especially a man’s responsibility for his family, which creates a man’s suffering during forced displacement.

The problem of not finding a job in one’s former profession was also experienced by Rāfi, a father of three children in his late thirties. He had learned to be a carpenter from his father and later opened a clothes shop in Syria. In Egypt, Rāfi initially tried to work as a carpenter and decorator but was often not paid by his clients. Consequently, he decided to work as a driver by renting an old car from an Egyptian for which he had to pay a high lease. The car was not air-conditioned, could not go faster than 80 km per hour and used a lot of petrol. The car was always meticulously clean on the inside as well as on the outside and in order to protect the occupants from the burning sun, Rāfi had put black curtains at each window. The first time Rāfi drove me in his car to 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, he immediately drew my attention to the car’s condition, which he had improved himself, because, as he said, he was a hardworking man: “I love to work. All the Syrians are hardworking people”. Then, Rāfi reiterated that he decided to work as a driver because it was the most reliable way to get money in Egypt. Nevertheless, being a driver was not an easy occupation for Rāfi. He had difficulties memorising street names, routes, and easily got lost in Cairo. He had clients who left him waiting at the agreed meeting point in his car without an AC in the middle of the day, not telling him that they would be late and not answering their phones. However, when comparing this kind of work to staying at home unemployed, Rāfi said that he preferred hard work and tough working conditions; being at home without work would make him distressed and depressed. On one of our regular trips to 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, he joked that his children would be happy not to have him at home unemployed, because, feeling anxious and unsettled, he would be very strict with them and would compel them to study all day. Rāfi was even available during Ramadan and the time of *iftār* (fast breaking). He told me he would take a bottle of water

and a sandwich with him in case he was booked at the time of sunset. His strict work schedule, his availability at any time even in Ramadan, and the determination with which he practised street names and tried to memorise routes in Cairo made it clear to me that it was far from easy for a man with a completely different career background to make a living in Egypt. Despite all the challenges he faced starting from the scratch, Rāfi was full of new business ideas. He wanted to rent a car with an AC and in better condition to attract more passengers, and he eventually managed to find an Egyptian car owner who agreed to give him a newer car with an AC, albeit for a higher rent than the old one. The first time Rāfi picked me up with his new car, he was not only full of pride but also showed me his newest service: On getting into the car, I was offered water and biscuits. Rāfi believed that this service would improve the clients' overall comfort during the journey and was surely a unique business idea. Rāfi's aim for success through hard work echoes Schielke's (2012) argument that success is a significant aspect of middle-classness and an important marker upon which the individual is judged.

In contrast to Rāfi, who, despite his creativity, diligence and ingenuity, was always on the edge of being unable to provide for his family, Dāwūd had a more relaxing work routine in Cairo. Since arriving in Egypt, he had worked for several Egyptian organisations. The first time, I met Dāwūd close to his home in a branch of an international café chain that was frequented by foreigners and middle- and upper-class Egyptians. He described Syrians as energetic, despite the hardship they faced as non-Egyptians seeking work in Egypt.

“You need documents from the ministry of social affairs and you also need health insurance and a visa. These are the most necessary things for the non-Egyptian workers. There are some Egyptians who give work to Syrians but without contracts. Also, they make them work longer hours than the Egyptians. Their salary is less and I don't want to say that they are ‘taking advantage’, but I see that the Syrians are better workers than the Egyptians. [...] Some people opened restaurants and some people opened clothes shops. They are working in these fields because they already have experiences. You cannot work in something that you don't know. A restaurant or a sweet shop or clothes shop, these types of shops are the main jobs that the Syrians do”.

His sister Nūr added that she and her brother saw that Syrians were preferred by Egyptian employers because they would work more efficiently for the same payment, had a better

education and would not disagree with their employers. When I asked her why Syrians would not protest, Nūr simply answered: “because they cannot complain”.

These ethnographic vignettes show the variety of experiences and challenges Syrians face as participants in the Egyptian labour market. The repeatedly mentioned a spirit of invention, creativity, hard work and new paths that were either perceived as a need for survival or as a characteristic that distinguished Syrian men from others, and reify a form of middle-class masculinity. Furthermore, the vignettes indicate the need to be able to handle hardship, precarity and an uncertain future, to challenge oneself by working in previously unknown professions, and the difficulty of coming to terms with the fact that all the effort might still not be enough to make ends meet for oneself and one’s family. Pride in one’s inventions and new ideas alternated with fear for one’s existence; the feeling to be better off in Egypt than somewhere else interchanged with anger about Egypt’s strict work and immigration laws.

Several studies deal with men’s precarious working conditions and the effects on their lives. In the context of migrant men and refugees in Canada, it was found that exploitation, racism, prevention of job advancement and use of oppression in the workplace were widespread causing damage to men’s dignity (Austin and Este 2001: 219). Nevertheless, out of fear of losing their jobs and being unemployed, migrant men predominantly accepted this treatment (*ibid.*: 220). Daniel Mains (2007: 661/662) found during his research among young, unemployed Ethiopian men, that engaging in low-status employment changed one’s position in relation to others and thus acquired a new, less respectable, even shameful meaning. Working in inferior occupations meant to consciously place oneself at the bottom of levels of authority in exchange for money, and thus unemployment and waiting for a better job were often preferred. Bučaitė-Vilkė and Tereškinas (2016: 200), who conducted research among unemployed young Lithuanian men, found that a widening variety of identification, values and attitudes relating to work aggravated pressure on the individual. Precarity in the labour market, experienced when working in part-time, temporary or dead-end jobs, thus became more than an economic or political condition, but translated into a constant feeling of insecurity, instability and contingency for the individual. These studies together with the ethnographic material here demonstrate the vulnerability men encounter if their participation in the labour market is challenged. Nevertheless, they also show the energy men put into finding new professions and building new lives from scratch.

### ***Working and studying at the same time***

Having focused on Syrian men's experiences in the Egyptian labour market more generally, I now turn to young Syrian men who had interrupted school or university studies to work, or worked and studied at the same time in order to support their family. Their age and position in their life course defined their negotiations of masculinity.

This was the case with Fādī, who should have been in his first year of university but had had to interrupt his education to support his family upon their arrival in Egypt. By the time I met him, he only worked occasionally as he had to prepare for his final school exams. One day, he took me to his workplace, a lingerie shop owned by a distant relative of his. While Fādī showed me around, a female customer interrupted our conversation in the shop asking for the best body-shaping underwear. In a professional tone and manner, he recommended one model and then referred her to his female colleague. Afterwards, while we were smoking *argīle* and playing *tāwle* (backgammon), he told me: "It is not my dream job. I would like to become a programming engineer. I find it embarrassing to work in this job because the girls who shop there flirt with me". He described that coping with work while also studying for his final exams in high school made him feel "older" than his peers, and "impatient" and "depressed", sensing that this double burden distinguished him from others. He said: "I feel that I am not supposed to handle of all of this". Nevertheless, Fādī was also proud of his abilities to work and study at the same time: "Men should be strong. They are stronger than women. They should support the family. I work and study at the same time. This makes us men. We stand more than we can".

Taking into consideration what traditionally defines manhood in contrast to adolescence in many Middle Eastern contexts – namely, marriage, completed education, a professional career, fatherhood and knowledge about one's society (see Ghannam 2013; Inhorn 2012; Peteet 1994) – Fādī cannot qualify as a man. He had not completed his education when he started working and was not able to save his income to move out of his parental home and get married. Nevertheless, in an environment with limited resources available, he spoke of the burden of simultaneous work and study as a threshold to manhood. He transformed the heavy workload he was facing on a day-to-day basis into a sign of masculinity and proof that he had transcended from boyhood to manhood.

His perception of having grown up speaks to an argument put forward by anthropologist Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002: 868), who starts from the premise that life

trajectories do not only vary between people but also within an individual, since the individual is internally complex. She argues that adulthood is an “articulated composite” (*ibid.*: 865) consisting of multiple distinct statuses, depending on the respective social interaction, one’s resources and skills. Entry into adulthood is consequently not a single moment, but, rather a status that social actors can inhabit in specific interactive relationships (*ibid.*: 869). Another concept worth mentioning is Wentzell’s (2015: 179) ‘composite masculinities’. She assumes that being a man demands different actions from the individual depending on the context. Masculinity is a composite collection of actions, attitudes and performances that are made to hang together and become a coherent image of the individual’s masculinity. She contends that men consciously weave materials available in their current life into a coherent, complete selfhood (*ibid.*). Fādī’s case suggests that masculine adulthood is not a complete status but one that depends on the social context and on the people before whom he defines it.

Over the years, Fādī continued supporting his family through work in the *baqāliyye* (corner shop) his father bought in an affluent neighbourhood in Cairo, while at the same time studying. Once, at the end of 2016, when I had been back in the UK for a long time, we chatted about his workload on WhatsApp.

- Fādī: I am now in my second year at university studying engineering and I am working too. This is how I am spending my life (*hayk 'am qaḍy hayātī*).
- Magdalena: You are working a lot!
- Fādī: yes, *wallah* Magdalena, I am tired but this is life. We need to exhaust ourselves in order to reach what we want (*lazim nit'ab la-nahṣal 'ala al-shī illy bidnā*).

Fādī suggests a version of masculinity that expects of men to exhaust themselves to be successful in the labour market. This is an example of the constant hard work to reach security, stability and fulfilment that Schielke (2012; 2015) describes as a major aspect of being middle class and living one’s life in the future tense.

I also discussed young men’s responsibilities with Muhannad. He was always busy studying for his exams in medical school or involved in organising events, planning future activities and raising funds for the NGO. As mentioned before, Muhannad’s family enjoyed very good living conditions in Cairo with his father being able to pay the high tuition fees at private universities for his children. Thus, Muhannad neither needed to work nor was he forced to interrupt his studies.

“I don’t work because I need money; I work because I feel that it is necessary that I work. As an adult guy, one should be able to take care of one’s family. Also, I should not remain a problem for my family. There are people who are spoiled and they are against working while studying”.

Similar to Fādī, Muhannad describes work as a necessity of adult manhood. Not working as a grown-up male can only be condemned and looked down upon.

Understanding masculine adulthood as an articulate composite consisting of multiple distinct statuses, and thus following Johnson-Hanks and Wentzell, helps to make sense of Fādī’s and Muhannad’s accounts in which they describe themselves as men in a specific social context, namely, when comparing themselves to other young Syrian men, who were not currently working and studying. Furthermore, these young men’s perceptions of work clearly show the importance of paid work and labour in order to be considered a mature man and thus reiterates the ideals of middle-class masculinity.

### ***Being a father during forced displacement***

While I used to spend a lot of time with Syrian male students, mostly in their early twenties, I also got to meet men who were fathers. After having met and talked to several older Syrian men who had children, I became interested in the impact the uprising and living in exile had on fatherhood. Again, I show in this paragraph that men’s position within their life course has a significant impact on their experiences and constructions of masculinities.

Anthropologists have hinted at the interdependence of cultural and economic transformations in the ways men engage in parenting and understand their roles as fathers (see for example Gutmann (1996)). Marcia Inhorn et al. (2015: 7) suggest the term “emergent fatherhood” to highlight the various ways in which men respond as fathers to the processes and challenges of globalisation. This term is intended to capture the creativity, hybridity, instability, constructedness and dynamism that the researchers detect in discourses and practices of contemporary fatherhood. Like manhood, fatherhood is described as unstable, ever-changing and being dependent on the various social contexts men encounter in their everyday lives (*ibid.*). In the context of forced migration, scholars suggest that fatherhood based on men’s position as the family breadwinner might not be sustainable (Szczepanikova 2005: 285) and that being a father becomes central to

manhood in exile. Consequently, men frequently suffer from the challenge to be a ‘good’ parent during forced displacement (Fiddian-Qasmiyah and Qasmiyah 2010: 307).

Generally, fathers were talked about with respect and with appreciation. They were the ones who did the right things for the families, made important decisions, had important roles to fulfil in various situations in life, supported their children for as long as possible, and were in most situations the backbone of the family. Layla, whose husband passed away when their children were adolescents, said the following about fathers from the perspective of a mother and wife:

“Muhammad [her husband], may God grant rest to his soul, passed away and it became very difficult for me because I had a doubled responsibility. Whenever I think of anything I wonder what he would have done if he were still alive. The father is very important in the house. It is a real mercy for the family to have a father. You can give half of the decisions to him. [...] My son felt, after his father passed away that a pyramid collapsed in front of him”.

Following her description, it can be argued that the father has an essential importance for the stability of the family and thus, assuming the role of a caring father comes with great respect.

Abū Walīd, a father of two boys in primary school, stressed that the life he had to live in Egypt did not allow him to be the father he aspired to be. He suffered from the feeling of being unable to protect his children. He told me that his son’s teacher wanted to be paid for giving him good marks, and that she used to beat his son. Abū Walīd felt that he could not complain, comply or protect his son from his teacher because he had no name, means, or network to rely on and no support to turn to in Egypt. He was driven by the fear that his inability to provide his children with what they asked for would harm their well-being:

“I am working sixteen hours a day so that I can live in this country in a reasonable situation. [...] If my children ask for something and I can’t provide them with it, it will cause them psychological damage. I am trying to answer their needs so that they don’t feel that they are missing anything”.

Abū Walīd was mostly worried about his children’s future and their education. He seemed to feel that it was his failure as a father that he could not afford to send them to better schools: “I know that they won’t improve because I cannot afford to let them go to private schools”. Jaji’s (2009: 192) analysis of young refugee men in Kenya comes to mind, in which she argues that the painful situation for men in exile is often triggered by their

inability to live up to their pre-flight aspirations and interpretations of the concept of masculinity, in Abū Walīd's case, fatherhood. Este and Tachble (2009: 460) describe that to Sudanese fathers in Canada fatherhood meant responsibility, commitment and care – notions that Abū Walīd felt he lacked as a father who faced the challenges of forced displacement. Due to his economically unstable situation, the poverty he lived in and the constant blackmailing he experienced, he could neither juggle with different registers of masculinity nor use fatherhood as a protective shield to boost his manhood like Abū Muhammad and Firās. His inability to be the father he wanted to be made him feel depressed, guilty and inadequate.

Not only fathers were conscious about changes in their role, sons also recognised these changes. Muhannad said:

“Back in Syria the family was more confident with their son. If I had trouble I was sure that they would help me. This is not the case here. They tell you here: ‘if there is a ten-percent chance that something will cause problems then stay away from it. We don’t need problems.’ Families changed and started to put pressure on their sons. In the past, they were more relaxed. There was more security in the family. The worst feeling is if the son has a problem and his father has to watch him struggle and cannot do anything for him, or if the father has to force his children to leave school in order to help the family. From inside the father’s heart will be cut in pain. [...] There are many actions they had to take and they didn’t want to do it”.

There are two emergent themes in Muhannad's narrative: On the one hand, he voiced a feeling of loss of safety and security because the family has broken away as his mainstay and protector in times of problems and trouble. On the other hand, he articulated compassion for fathers who have to observe their children struggling without being able to support them, or who even have to make their children's life and future more challenging by taking them out of school. He can understand a father's pain. His account echoes Rabo's (2005) analysis of the interdependence of fathers and sons. Muhannad recognises that this father's support has declined in Egypt and this affects his own life, since he can no longer take risky decisions. He clearly described that with the family's move to Egypt, his father's dominant, and at the same time reassuring, position shook and fractured. Furthermore, his statement is about love and care for each other and about the pain of seeing his father's weakness.

I will return to the theme of fatherhood in Chapter 6, where I address how Syrian men used their role as fathers strategically as an acceptable and respectable version of manhood when other forms of masculinities, such as militant masculinity, were not available to them.

### ***Facing unemployment in Egypt***

Work opportunities, work conditions and future perspectives dominated many conversations I had with Syrians in Egypt. Unemployment was often a topic of particular concern.

The misfortune of unemployment for men during displacement is the focus of several academic articles. During her research among men who have been refused asylum in the UK, Melanie Griffiths (2015: 476/480) found that unemployment and poverty were associated with the stigma of idleness and dependency and contributed to a feeling of loss of control. Unemployment was also experienced as a disruption of normality, and the consequent vulnerability was a source of shame for many of the men she interviewed. Likewise, Rosemary Jaji (2009: 182) observed that young refugee men from the Great Lakes Region who settled in Kenya felt marginalised and unable to live up to their own standards of masculinity due to unemployment during their displacement. Unemployed men living with their families sensed that their roles as husband and father were undermined, especially if humanitarian organisations intervened, which caused them to feel inadequate, undignified and insecure (*ibid.*: 8/9).

Wasīm, a social worker in a community centre for refugees, shared gossip with me that seemed to be present in every neighbourhood and was always about this one unsuccessful, male figure, who used to be a well-paid manager, doctor or engineer in Syria, but had not found adequate work in Egypt even though he tried, which made him eventually stay at home. Such stories circulated about a man ‘failing’ his family in Egypt despite his professional background in Syria, and while most Syrians appeared to feel sympathy for this unsuccessful man, a lack of understanding was also prevalent - especially if the consequence of not finding a job was for the man to stay at home. Wasīm talked mostly empathically about unemployed men:

“There are some men, who just stay at home although some of them were managers of companies back in Syria. The husband of Sāmiya [a woman in the neighbourhood] was working in programming. He is not working now and when

he finds a job it is usually only a small job and usually the salary is not enough so until now he is staying at home. This puts a lot of pressure on him and on the family. I think that men are the neglected ones. The aid associations focus on children and women. No one looks at men. No one looks at their problems! It is correct that many men are working, however, I think that associations should focus on men that are older than thirty years. These people don't work or study, they just stay at home which puts more pressure on them, especially, when he is at home and his wife is working instead of him or if he sits down and his brother in Saudi Arabia or the Emirates sends him money”.

Wasīm describes how the experience of unemployment is aggravated if female relatives work instead of men or if they become the recipients of financial support from more affluent male relatives. In contrast, Qays, who talked to me predominantly in *fuşha*, was less compassionate and generally characterised unemployed men as idle, dishonest, and wishing to live off others:

“The majority of men could find jobs and men who didn't find work are just trying to escape from work (*wa man lam yagid 'amalan huwwa yatharrab min al-'amal*). The Syrian in general is characterised by his ability to create job opportunities and to find economic solutions. I don't recall that men ever had a problem finding work. We could find jobs for all the people who asked us. There are some Syrians, as it is the case in every society, who like to have privileges without working (*yurīdūna tagannub wa yurīd al-ḥusūl 'ala al-imtiyāzāt bidūn ay muqābil bisuhūla*)”.

Qays not only looks down on unemployed Syrian men, but also denies them the status of Syrian, since, for him, good ‘Syrianness’ is defined through high work ethics, commitment and creativity.

Another issue that came up in the form of gossip was the value of work. Abū Muḥammad, the father of four and owner of a corner shop in Cairo, told me disparagingly and indignantly about a Syrian man living in his neighbourhood, who decided that he would not work in Egypt if he could not earn more than 500 to 1,000 LE per month (approx. 60 – 110 US Dollars in 2015). Because of this man's refusal to work, his children and wife had to provide for the family. Abū Muḥammad assumed that the man was not altogether sane, even though he excused such a sentiment as well, by saying that it was difficult for men, who used to be successful business owners back in Syria, to come to terms with the modest salary they would get for their labour in Egypt. Abū Muḥammad's

narrative discussing the value of work echoes an observation by Fiddian-Qasmiyah and Qasmiyah (2010: 308), who found that an asylum-seeking man in the UK they interviewed emphasised his productivity, even though he was engaged in voluntary and unpaid labour. They argued that their participant relocated the focus from being paid and being the breadwinner to being economically active, and that he turned his activity into a proof of his aim to regain his position in society and his family – none of which Abū Muḥammad’s contact did, and for which he was consequently criticised.

The significance of gossip and judgement of men by other men that is prevalent among Syrians in Cairo echoes an argument by Nauja Kleist (2010:199), who analyses how Somali men in Europe restored and normalised their masculinity in conversations about other refugee men, who did not manage to adhere to what they defined as an ideal version of masculinity. By referring to a continuum between the poles of respected and failed masculinity, the norm was also established. Through speaking about other men who fail, Somali men managed to position themselves, sometimes emphatically and sometimes scornfully, at a distance from the abject prototype of man. Similarly, Syrian men I met in Cairo used gossip to distance themselves from the ‘failing’ unemployed Syrian man. Referring to the failing man put them automatically in a better position, whether or not they could maintain the prestige and status of their former employment in their new profession in Egypt.

There was only a small number of men who had ‘no good reason’, such as illness or advanced age, and thus no excuse for not working and who were willing to talk to me. Often, it was through women I met during visits to various NGOs that I would hear about their husbands’ unemployment. This was the case with Um Bāsim, whom I introduced in the previous chapter. I got in touch with her through Um Khālid and I started to meet her regularly over several months. We usually met in her flat, however, whenever I visited her, her husband was not at home – or if he was, he would not appear. Um Bāsim told me when we met for the first time that her husband used to be a *mu‘allim* (boss) in Syria, a successful and influential businessman and owner of an ironworks, and that she did not have to work. When the family arrived in Cairo, he tried to run several business projects with different Egyptian partners but was tricked by all of them, which caused him to lose all of his savings. Since then, Um Bāsim’s husband had developed hearing difficulties, distractiveness and bursts of rage and irritability. Um Bāsim and her children had to find ways to provide for the family. She and her daughter tried to establish themselves as hairdressers working from home and one of her sons worked in a car repair shop. Often, she would ask me if I could help her with the monthly rent or if I knew someone that I

could ask for financial support on her behalf. Knowing that the current situation was unbearable for her husband, Um Bāsim tried to protect him in front of others: “I don’t want to shame my husband by telling people that I am working. He was an important man in Syria”. Her reluctance to speak in public about the family’s poverty because of her husband’s former status in Syria shows the irreconcilability of their lives in Syria and in Egypt. Furthermore, Um Bāsim’s attempt to protect her husband echoes an observation by Farha Ghannam, who found that women used the authority of their husbands in their statements and acts in strategic ways. Often, they overemphasised their husband’s work and effort and undermined their own. Ghannam (2013: 76) comes to the conclusion that this behaviour helps support the standing of a man and that the woman in this case “garner[s] for him the kind of public recognition and legitimacy central to a masculine trajectory”. The encounter with Um Bāsim shows that she was aware of her ability to bestow on, or take away recognition from, her husband and that she tried to protect his reputation for as long as possible.

However, it might not only be sorrow and pity for her husband that motivated her, but also that it somehow guaranteed some dignity for her and her children as well. This echoes an argument by Friederike Stolleis (2004: 30), who asserts that women in Damascus were cautious with what they shared about their own contribution to the household income. If they had admitted that their labour was significant for the family’s survival, they would have not only undermined their husband’s reputation but also their own. Likewise, Penny Vera-Sanso (2016: 92) argues that if men in South India are unable to provide for the family and their wives take over – which effectively feminises the man and masculinises his wife – the family has to be cautious about sharing this in public because having a feminised head of household “exposes the behaviour and status of family members to greater social scrutiny and negative commentary” (*ibid.*: 94).

When I met Salīm (to whom I briefly referred in the introduction), I experienced a similar interaction in which women protected the ‘failing’ man in front of me. Salīm came to the office of an NGO where I spent the day volunteering. His clothes were worn out and dirty, his beard and hair needed cutting. After entering the office, he immediately asked for the food that the secretaries shared behind the desk and ate it eagerly. After his outburst of anger during our conversation, which I described as a painful experience in the introduction, he left, but not before making me promise to try to help him and his family. When he was gone, the Syrian women working as secretaries told me to be sympathetic: Salīm had been a respectable engineer in Syria and had lost everything when he came to Egypt, and at that time he could barely make ends meet. I was told by one of

them that I should understand that unemployment and the consequent struggle destroyed men's psychological well-being and that I should not take his anger personally. Similar to what is described by Ghannam's work and to what occurred to me when I visited Um Bāsim, the secretaries came to Salīm's defence and appealed to me to understand the challenges he faced so as to better classify his reactions.

Like Salīm and Abū Bāsim, Abū Nabīl was unable to provide for his family, although he chose a different way to hide this piece of information in public and from me. He was in his fifties and came to Cairo in 2012 with one of his wives and the two children he had with her. I met him in a shop selling orthopaedic shoes and medical supplies located in a dark side-corridor in one of the malls in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, which belonged to an Egyptian businessman. The mall, the corridor and the shop itself had seen better days and it did not seem as if many customers found their way to it. The next time, I met Abū Nabīl at his flat where I was offered tea and juice and was introduced to his wife and daughters. Soon after these first meetings, Abū Nabīl began to ask me for money in order to give it to Syrian families he knew, who were in need of financial support. Um Khālid, who had put me in touch with Abū Nabīl, was the one who explained to me that through these requests Abū Nabīl was asking for financial support for himself, but was too shy and embarrassed to tell me that. She begged me not to reveal that I knew he was in dire need of money and that his story of providing for other families was made up. Thus, I did not challenge, though not without discomfort, his continuous requests for help and donations for poor and needy acquaintances. Once, Abū Nabīl asked me to get medication from an Egyptian pharmacist I knew, who had offered to help Syrians by selling his products at a huge discount. When I delivered the medication, Abū Nabīl's wife opened the door and thanked me cheerfully for bringing the medication for Abū Nabīl's mother. She obviously had no idea that Abū Nabīl asked me for money and support by positioning himself as a community leader helping Syrian families in need, rather than admitting that he could not afford the medication for his mother.

And finally, there was Abū Khālid. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he introduced himself to me as community leader and several times I gave him bags filled with clothes that a friend of mine had collected in the school where she was working. After one clothes donation, I met him and he was wearing one of the suits from the bags of clothes that he had promised to give to Syrian families in need. It made me wonder whether he himself was in need just like Abū Nabīl. He asked me for money for a Syrian family and I promised that I would try to ask for donations among Egyptian and German friends. The son of that family had cancer, he told me, and needed expensive treatment.

A couple of weeks later, I received a phone call from Abū Khālid asking to meet me urgently. Once we had sat down in a quiet café in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, he told me that he himself needed the money which I had collected for the boy with cancer. He assured me that someone else had taken care of the boy and that he had helped so many families over the years and now it was his turn. He told me that he needed the money urgently to be able to meet his family in Turkey. He said that he was embarrassed to confess in front of his family that he did not have enough money for the ticket from Cairo to Istanbul. Furthermore, his wife needed to see a doctor and the whole family needed to find a way to settle down in Istanbul. During this time, I often chatted via Facebook with his son in Turkey. He said the following with regards to my interaction with his father:

“Don't expect of someone like my father to tell you the truth about all the small details, especially in these days. it's considered embarrassing. [...] I hope you don't misunderstand the fact that he wouldn't be able to be honest about these details and to tell you the truth more, even me I wouldn't like to talk about these details. we don't think it's like bad lying, but it's just something unnecessary to share... You wouldn't like someone to worry about you even if your things aren't 100% okay, but if things are going well with you then you say to others that things are fine”.

For Abū Nabīl and for Abū Khālid, it seemed most important to prove in public and in front of me that they were in control of the situation and that they were still able to provide for their family. There was an embarrassment related to admitting helplessness and the inability to get out of one's situation independently that men seemed to avoid and circumvent for as long as possible; in Abū Nabil's case, through hiding the truth about his desperate economic situation despite his efforts to work. This resonates with a study by Alice Szczepanikova (2010: 465) who argues that male and female refugees from the former Soviet Union in the Czech Republic considered it undignified for a man to ask for help from strangers and acknowledge his helplessness and dependency. This, she suggests, was related to a dominant idea that considers masculinity to be incompatible with asking for help (*ibid.*). As a result, men rarely approached the Czech aid organisations but sent their female family members instead.

### ***Masculinising by referring to traditions and patriarchy***

While several scholars dealing with work and masculinity jump to the generalising conclusion that male unemployment leads to men seeking to assuage their dented masculinity through crime, violence, or drug use (see Bučaité-Vilké and Tereškinas 2016: 201; Kabachnik et al. 2013), I argue that precarity in the labour market or unemployment lead to far more nuanced reactions from Syrian men. One of these was the constant referral to Syrian patriarchal ‘traditions’ and customs. Majd said:

“In our tradition, it’s shameful if the woman is responsible for providing money for the house. This is shameful for the man. If she wants to work because she wants to go out and get to know people, it’s okay. However, if she has to pay for the flat – no, if she has to buy the house – no, if she has to pay for her clothes – no, if she has to pay for her gold – no. This is the man’s responsibility”.

I heard statements like this one idealising ‘traditional’ gender relations in a patriarchal system and naturalising men in the provider position and women in the position of the weak and privileged in need of manly protection, when I asked Syrian men about Syrian women’s participation in the Egyptian and the Syrian labour markets. By patriarchy, I mean a system of gender relations that is organised around the senior man’s position of superiority over all women and younger men of the family. The man is responsible for the honour of the women in his family (Kandiyoti 1988: 278/279). A system of patriarchy keeps functioning because of the use of kinship structures, morality, and idioms as its legitimisation. Furthermore, patriarchy should be understood as intersecting with nationality, class or ethnicity (Joseph 1993: 459/460).

As suggested by Majd, the dominant discourse that determined work as men’s responsibility was based on the notion that Syrian women had the luxury of staying at home and taking care of the children. Working for pleasure, self-education or networking was acceptable, but a woman’s financial contribution to the household translated into shame for her husband. Rabo (2005: 21) comes to a similar conclusion; she found that the ideal for most Aleppians, male and female, was that women should not be employed, nor have their own enterprise, nor work in other ways for money. The common perception was that a woman had the right to be supported by her husband, which means that he must feed the family and do the shopping. In return, it is the woman’s obligation to create a home.

Since gender provides a way of articulating and naturalising differences and inequalities, class is deeply gendered (Scott 1999: 60). The image of complementary masculinity and femininity is not only prevalent in Syria but can be traced to the rise of the British middle class in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is deeply engrained in a global culture of middle-classness and lifestyle that idealises the position of women in the home (see Radhakrishnan 2009: 199) For the middle class, respectable femininity confined to the home constitutes a crucial element of symbolic capital (*ibid.*: 201). It can be found in various parts of the world, such as in South India, where Penny Vera-Sanso (2016: 80) observed that masculinity and femininity were used as ‘metaphors’ by various actors to attribute hierarchically structured values, to create and discipline subjectivities and to naturalise relations of inequality. She observed that in South India masculinity is defined through the provision of food while dependents can simply sit and eat. Men claim their right to pay for food by referring to the complementarity of sex roles, social expectations, and biology. If men are unable to provide for and feed their family, for example, because of unemployment due to age discrimination in the labour market, what lies in wait for them is feminisation. According to Henrieke Donner’s (2015: 137) ethnography on the Indian middle class in Kolkata, the aim of highlighting conservative gender roles is to distinguish oneself from those above and below. She observes that working middle-class women aim to separate themselves from working lower-class women by stressing that working-class women need paid employment and only work in specific professions (*ibid.*: 138).

In a conversation I had with Sāmir, the director of the Syrian programme in an influential NGO, he spoke about an approach suggested by a Western donor organisation directed at Syrian women, which he strongly condemned. The donor organisation had announced that it would support Syrian women who submitted ideas for business plans aimed at earning an income. Indignantly, Sāmir said:

“It is as if you asked a child to hold 100 kg. If you ask a man to hold 100 kg, he will find it hard, but a child will not be able to do it at all. In Syria, women took care of their husbands and children only and now they are supposed to come up with business ideas. In Syria, it’s not appreciated to have a wife that works”.

As Sāmir explained, Syrian women were not able to stand up to the responsibility because they had not been exposed to work in Syria. The ability to work is, in his account, comparable to bodily strength that women simply lack. Despite his professional knowledge of the conditions of Syrian refugees in Egypt, Sāmir tried to keep patriarchy

intact and ignored the fact that many women in Egypt have in fact started working. Instead, he portrayed women's labour as simply impossible and additionally unappreciated.

For Muhamad, the incompatibility of Syrianness and female labour was a unifying aspect, a way the Syrian community came to imagine itself: "For us as Syrian society, the common thing is that the girl doesn't work. [...] In Syria, the girl is *sitt al-bayt* (the lady of the house)". According to him, communalism is created based on the idea that women's participation in the labour market was not part of the Syrian identity. He continued:

"I told you that a high percentage of Syrians don't like that, even if he is about to die from hunger, to ask his wife or sister to go to work. He finds it difficult to request money from her or her family. For us, it is a big shame ('ayb), if I don't spend for the family. Even if I am dying from hunger I rather choose to die. Likewise, if I receive a guest I should be generous with him even if I don't have anything. Poverty is not a shame, but the mistakes are a shame".

Muhamad speaks in idealised terms about masculine responsibility, and women's lack of responsibility, for the household income. He himself had not experienced poverty and thus spoke from a privileged position describing women's contribution to the household as disgrace and failure.

It is noteworthy that Majd, Muhamad and Sāmir all referred to some form of 'tradition', past, culture or life back in Syria organised through patriarchy to define women's position in Syrian society. They seem to turn to these terms in order to gain more credibility and give their statements more weight. According to Mary Ann Tétreault (2000: 75), tradition creates "images of timelessness and subjection" implying that people's positions in life are determined by certain essential qualities. However, tradition is never as static and fixed as it is presented. Rather, it is "constituted as it is lived and used" (Ratele 2013: 148). It "takes and strips form and content, and is charged by different meanings in the mouth of different actors" (Monterescu 2006: 139). Several scholars (see Ratele 2013; Kleist 2010; Sideris 2004; Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985) have noted how men make use of tradition to guarantee and preserve their dominant position over women. Kleist (2010: 199) observed that Somali men in the diaspora used a rhetoric that naturalised certain versions of culture and tradition and failed to highlight the processes through which these have come to be seen as dominant. Kopano Ratele (2013: 151) highlights that men's turn towards tradition might in fact signal the insecurity of the

dominant group within traditions (*ibid.*). And for the context of patriarchy, Deniz Kandiyoti (2013) suggests that in case ‘patriarchy-as-usual’ is no longer secured, it comes to a process of ‘masculinist restoration’, during which higher levels of coercion and violence are exercised and more varied ideological state apparatuses are employed to ensure its reproduction. Based on these authors, I suggest that Majd and other Syrian men in Egypt referred to Syrian tradition and culture in order to put their claims for masculine domination on stable ground and to restore a certain version of patriarchal order. I suggest that turning to tradition and restoration of patriarchy makes sense during forced displacement in which gender relations and patriarchal structures are inherently unstable and subject to change.

Despite Syrian men’s attempts to ignore and downplay women’s work, Syrian women were visibly engaging in different forms of employment in Egypt. I met Syrian women who worked as primary school and kindergarten teachers, social workers, hairdressers and secretaries, and I got in touch with several women selling home-cooked food on the street on a daily basis. In some areas, Syrian women were also begging in the streets. Catherine Brun (2000) describes the negotiation of women’s roles in the labour market in her analysis of Burundian refugees in Tanzania. She argues that men’s self-perception of being the main breadwinner of the family did not change despite women’s rising contribution to the household income. Rather, women’s changing practices with regards to work became a symbol for men’s inadequacies, and women’s presence in the labour market would not have been approved if men had been able to provide for the family on their own (*ibid.*: 11). Likewise, Kamran Ali (2003: 331) who analysed Egyptian working-class life argues that for working-class men in Egypt employment was considered the only source of male dignity and consequently women’s participation in the labour market to ensure the family’s survival destabilised men’s role as the provider and challenged their authority within the family. Thus, I suggest that men do not only try to restore ‘patriarchy-as-usual’, but to similarly save their class position to which women’s role in the household is highly important.

Muhannad, Sāmir and Majd ignored the fact that Syrian women were present and visible in the Egyptian labour market. Instead, they kept referring to an idealised version of gender relations, in which men remained the main and sole breadwinner while women could stay at home. They masculinised against women by defining women as weak and themselves as their ‘natural’ and ‘traditional’ protectors and providers. When bringing together the analysis of masculinity, femininity and tradition, Connell’s classic concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful again. She argues that the relationships within gender

are defined by the relationships between genders. Masculinities and femininities are produced together through their contact with each other in the process that constitutes a gender order (Connell 1998: 7). Gender is relational and notions of masculinity are defined in contradistinction from some model of femininity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848). Women's position in society is thus extremely relevant to constructions of masculinity and to constructions of class belonging.

### *Perceptions of Syrian working women*

Syrian women in Egypt were not only visibly working in Cairo's streets, NGOs and schools, they also described themselves and others as working women. When talking with Syrian women who attended my English classes or when I was invited to a women's gathering, there were frequent discussions about work that altered the picture presented to me by most Syrian men. Some Syrian women told me that they were indeed working for the first time in Cairo, and would have not started working had their family's economic conditions not forced them to do so. Others had held jobs as teachers, accountants or secretaries in Syria. Most women agreed that in Syria a woman would not be seen cleaning the streets or working in a shop, which reflected their middle-class backgrounds, but they indicated that there was nothing unusual about the notion of working women in and of itself.

Existing literature (that is mostly outdated) on women in the Syrian labour market points to the importance of taking into consideration a woman's class background. According to official numbers summarised by Shaaban (1998: 111), women made up twenty-one percent of employees working for the Syrian government and constituted a third of the labour force in the agricultural sector in the 1990s. However, Shaaban (*ibid.*: 112) doubts the latter number assuming that women constituted fifty percent of the workforce in rural areas but were neither officially recognised, nor had access to the attendant benefits, such as independent income, pension or a role in management. Rabo (1996: 162) goes as far as to call rural women in most Syrian regions the backbone of the labour force. Furthermore, she highlights that it was well known and accepted that poor, uneducated women worked as house cleaners or engaged in work from home, which was usually low-paid, and mainly textile-related, farmed-out work (Rabo 2005). For women from the Syrian upper class, however, work was a way to see and be seen. Young, single, upper-class women rarely worked to become self-sufficient and to set up an independent

household; work was rather a venue for display with the aim to secure a successful future as a married woman (Salamandra 2004: 52). For married women, work functioned as an opportunity to gain social contacts and exhibit their husbands' affection and economic status through their outward appearance (*ibid.*).

Layla, the widow and mother of two teenagers, who always stressed her family's middle-class background, said the following with regards to women's position in the family and in the labour market in Syria:

"The woman in Syria was very precious [...]. The woman only works if she wants to and only in a good job. According to our traditions, the woman is allowed to work and can go out and to do whatever she wants, but all of that was optional for her. If she wants to work then she works, if she wants to practise her hobbies or teach, she can do that. She had the freedom to do whatever she wants, but her role here in Egypt of course has changed".

She continued: "The woman in our homeland is honoured (*al-marā'a 'annā mukarama*). The husband does everything. Everything is done by the husband or the brother or the son. The girl at her family's house gets whatever she wants". Layla reiterated what most Syrian men I met said. She referred to the Syrian tradition, the patriarchal order of the Syrian middle class that guaranteed women's precious, valued and honoured position in Syrian society. Thus, she created a middle-class masculinity and femininity that gave men the responsibility to provide and women the privilege to choose whether they wanted to work or not.

While most Syrian men's description of women working in Syria was rigid, static and clear, some of them reluctantly acknowledged that women's situation had changed and that some women were indeed engaged in work in Egypt. Rāfi, for instance, proposed on one of our trips to 6<sup>th</sup> of October City that his wife could cook Syrian dishes for me. He explained that she would cook for Egyptian clients occasionally and justified this by saying that she would simply love to work, just as all the Syrian people would love to work. He also mentioned that she could keep the money for herself while he was in charge of providing for her and the children. Interestingly, the narrative he used resonates with Stolleis' (2004: 30) analysis of middle- and upper-class working women in Syria, mentioned before. Rāfi uses the same line of argumentation as the women Stolleis met in Damascus, who commonly underlined that they were not forced to work, that their husbands had a good income, and that they could keep their income for personal expenses, knowing that it could damage their reputation if they confessed that their husbands did

not earn enough to provide for the family. Rāfi's way of introducing his wife's work did not only seem to protect his wife's reputation but also his own, assuring me that it was his wife's will, personal freedom and love for work that made her start cooking, while he was still in charge of providing for her and his three children.

Qutayba acknowledged women's participation in the labour market, as well. He told me that he recognised women's presence as street vendors in Cairo's streets, which was a sharp contrast to women's labour in his home town. There, women rarely worked and if they did, they worked as teachers. Qutayba said that he had a hard time accepting seeing Syrian women working in the street. Once, he saw a teenage girl from his home town selling food in the streets. While her family used to have a good standard of living back in Syria, here, she had to carry her wares and surely had to endure sexual harassment from Egyptian men. He also believed that Egyptian men would consider her to be a prostitute.

Only a few Syrian men, among them Abū Walīd, whose wife worked as a kindergarten teacher, expressed a positive perception of the developments that made more and more Syrian women start working in Egypt.

"Women became stronger. What happened in the country made them rely on themselves. My wife didn't use to buy anything on her own. I used to buy everything for her. In Syrian society, a woman can work, she can be employed, she can go to university, but according to the majority of the people, the man should provide for everything. He should buy everything for her. Any time she goes out, the husband should pay for it and in addition to that, she sometimes doesn't know the names of the streets. But this situation here obligates them to rely on themselves. So, they started to go out buy themselves and make decisions. The whole thing helped them in general. They were tortured by the situation but it made them stronger, so they started to know how to make a decision. Speaking about my wife and my sister and the people around me, they all changed 180 degrees. They became stronger."

Abū Walīd recognised a change in women's attitudes and was one of the few men I met who seemed to welcome his wife's increased autonomy and self-confidence.

Making sense of Syrian women working in Egypt seemed to have evoked in several men the need to downplay or straightforwardly ignore their presence. Only reluctantly did men acknowledge Syrian women's contribution to the labour market because it threatened to challenge their middle-class masculinity and position in the

patriarchal order that was already challenged because of their unstable working conditions. The overriding wish appeared to be to put women in their place based on men's difficulty in making sense of changing gender roles and a change to 'patriarchy-as-usual'. Women's work rarely had a positive connotation.

### ***Building masculinity on women's ascribed weakness***

When spending time with young Syrian men, I observed that they used another strategy to masculinise against women: they described women as being unable to live the life they as bachelors lived on their own in Cairo. Hānī, the medical student, said the following when we were discussing that he lived without his family in Cairo:

"If I don't want to cook, I order food from the restaurant. Food is not so important. For the guy, it's normal, but a girl might care more about what she wants to eat. It's not like a family or like a woman, who has children and she is alone and she needs someone to help her. If you are a man alone, you can manage. Maybe for her, if she will marry without rights, it's better for her than to stay alone. It's better than staying alone and the people disturb her. There are really bad people. But for the guy he can do anything: he can eat, not eat, sleep, not sleep. And if he cooks and the food is bad, he can eat it without problems."

Hani takes women's 'pickiness' with regards to food and sleep and her inability to defend herself against harassment as a proof of men's strength and endurance in times of hardship. He also takes it as a reason to justify living in an unfair, unwanted marriage. The version of masculinity he creates achieves meaning and depends on the contrasting definition of femininity and is again a way of finding positive aspects in 'patriarchy-as-usual'. Likewise, Majd differentiated between men and women's varying resiliences.

"Dealing with the girls in the Syrian families is the same as before, but they are a bit more concerned about them because of the situation in the country. The nature of the country here is strange. If the guy goes out, something will happen to him. If it happens to a guy, for sure it will happen to a girl".

Akram, an Arabic primary school teacher in his late twenties who lived by himself in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, related women and men's 'naturally' different capabilities to adapt and women's assumed weakness to men's enhanced responsibilities for women's safety:

“In Syria, she goes out and buys the things herself – here no! she can meet my family and get to know them. In Syria, the girl would have lived among my family, but here I don’t really know the people who are around me. So, I stay with her at home. If we need food, I will go to bring it. If she wants to go out with my sisters or friends, I’ll bring her out. The important thing is the unknown fear and the absence of security here in Egypt, but it is the responsibility of a man”.

In contrast to Abū Walīd who argued that men in Syria had immense duties, Akram described how the hostility of the unknown place they lived in, increased women’s dependence on men’s support.

The following quote by Frank Barrett, who conducted research in the US navy, resonates with the accounts I collected from Syrian men dealing with women’s ‘natural weakness’:

“Masculinity achieves meaning within patterns of differences. If success for men is associated with “not quitting” in the face of hardships, femininity becomes associated with quitting, complaining, and weakness. This follows Kimmel’s (1994) notion that definitions of masculinity depend on changing definitions of women and gay men who serve as the “others” against which heterosexual men construct and project an identity (Barrett 1996: 133).

Barrett observed that women who joined the US navy became associated with weakness, lack of will and bodily strength in the accounts of male officers. He found that a general consensus was created that defined a bodily and psychological difference between male and female sailors. What these men engage in, he argued, was a devaluation of women through which to define their own masculinity. In a similar vein, young Syrian men managed to gain masculine capital by describing that they were able to live on their own, that they could eat bad food, and that they could survive on the street on their own, while they stressed that Syrian women were unable to do so, and thus needed constant support from men.

### ***Conclusion***

In the Egyptian labour market, Syrian men faced difficulties in reclaiming their middle-class masculinity. They were confronted with the pain of starting again from scratch, of status loss, and an inability to prove one’s skills, and they experienced humiliation,

dependency on others and vulnerability in the labour market. Unemployment was especially feared and considered to be the opposite of proper manhood. Hence, several Syrian men who interacted with me could not admit their inability to provide and were instead hiding this from me – if necessary, by circumventing the truth.

The first part of this chapter described Syrian men's sense of pride and shame and showed how most men found it difficult to put their middle-class masculinity, essentially built on providing, on stable ground, while the second part of this chapter illustrated several strategies men applied to reclaim their middle-class manhood. One of these strategies was men's engagement in judging others and demarcating themselves from them. The circulation of gossip and the judgement of unsuccessful Syrian men in Egypt also involved the fear of being judged, exposed and humiliated one day.

Adopting another strategy, Syrian men marked the labour market as male territory and fought to keep the ability to define themselves as hard-working providers, protectors, and as stronger in times of hardship. In order to do so, they highlighted women's role in the household and their presumed weakness. Women had no space in these territories and the harsh application of a black-and-white-model of complementary gender ideals proves that. Moreover, denying the position of breadwinner to women seemed to be a way to avoid admitting that women did not need them as much as men wanted to be needed. By highlighting that women were better off in the household, Syrian men managed to effectively undermine women's power and self-worth and did not need to imagine whether the construct of the strong, able man and the weak woman was indeed an illusion.

This chapter shows the enormous value Syrian men gave to the ideal of the male provider role, even if this role is contradicted by facts. Men, at various stages of their life, were guided by an urgency to uphold and hold onto being the patriarch. No matter if they were at the threshold of adulthood or struggled with their role as fathers and sons, Syrian men made an effort to conform to the role of provider in their narratives, interactions and decisions. With its focus on fathers and youths specifically, and men of working age more generally, this chapter emphasises the significance of analysing masculinity from an intersectional lens that pays attention to a man's position within his life course as well as his marital and parental status.

In this chapter, I applied several classic concepts of masculinity studies and found them relevant and useful. To reinstate masculinity there was again (as in Chapter 2) a need for the 'other', as well as a need for the 'weak woman' and a need for references to patriarchal traditions. As illustrated, these arguments echo the works of Connell, Kimmel

and Barrett. A finding of this chapter that might add to the classical concepts is that men jumped between different strategies and discourses when and how it suited them.

## **Chapter 4 – *Of Misrecognition, Love and Fury***

### **or Loss of status and ‘groom-ability’: Making sense of changes in marriage negotiations**

“It’s too early to think about [marriage]. The situation is difficult so it will be delayed. In Syria, it was possible because there was a house and a car, but here I don’t have this idea”.

Bashār said this to me when we sat together with Hānī and Māzin in Māzin’s family’s flat. We were talking about marriage and whether they were thinking about finding a spouse and getting married at that point in time in Egypt. As young men in their mid-twenties almost at the end of their studies, it would have been the ‘right’ time to start considering marriage – at least in pre-2011 Syria. Bashār’s response includes several aspects that also came up in conversations I had with other single Syrian men in their late twenties or early thirties: acknowledgement of displacement as a difficult and exhausting situation, referring to the capital and status they held in Syria that would have made it possible to get married, and the inability to think about marriage in their current situation in Egypt. Overall, I sensed, when spending time with Syrian men of this age group that the topic of marriage was a heavy burden on them. I was told that the engagement and marriage procedures that were prevalent in Syria had changed since they had come to live in Egypt, and that they had to find a way to deal with these changes if they did not want to delay their marriage.

This chapter deals with the changes in marriage patterns experienced and observed by Syrian men in Egypt. Furthermore, I discuss the issue of loss of status and capital that were most visible in the context of marriage. Because of displacement, Syrian men asking for a woman’s hand in marriage frequently experienced misrecognition based on the in-laws’ lack of knowledge of the groom’s former status. Love and the development of a marital relationship were directly related to one’s economic stability and future perspectives, and consequently it was not only the groom’s lost symbolic capital but also his economic capital that hampered the marriage process. Another aspect that warrants analysis is the marriage of Syrian women to Egyptian men. Syrian men had difficulty accepting this situation and blamed Syrian women’s weakness for intermarriages.

## ***Remembering marriage traditions in Syria***

Um Māzin and Abū Māzin, whom I visited regularly in their modest flat, had been married for almost forty years and happily shared with me the story of how they met, became engaged and were married, which was intertwined with the experience of when their daughter got married in Syria ten years ago. They were both in their sixties and due to their unstable health conditions were unable to often leave the flat. Abū Māzin used to work at an electricity company owned by the Syrian state and Um Māzin took care of their, now grown-up, children. Um Māzin told me almost every time I met her about the possessions and social position they previously had in Syria. She frequently spoke about their real estate properties in the city they came from, in the countryside and at the beach. Abū Māzin talked extensively about his social life and his political and voluntary work at the communal level in his home town. Once he proudly showed me a business card indicating that he was member of a political party in the city he came from, which he pulled out of an otherwise empty wallet and carefully put back after I had looked at it.

When I asked them about their engagement and marriage, Um Māzin recalled how sharing a house with the family was the norm for newlyweds forty years ago, whereas nowadays brides would ask for a house of their own, a car, a chalet and a lot of gold. As well as Um Māzin describing today's importance placed on possessions and consumer goods, Mahmūd also made it very clear to me what was expected of him as a groom: "there are three keys to marriage: a house, a car, and a shop".

Their wedding celebration was modest, Um Māzin said, with home-made food and a party in the house of the groom, while "nowadays the party takes place in a hall and costs a lot more". When I asked them how young men could pay for all these expenses, Abū Māzin explained that the family of the groom would usually step in to support him financially. Their engagement period was short, Um Māzin continued to explain, because they were related and already knew each other. Their marriage was arranged, she said, since until now, "men prefer that the family chooses". Abū Māzin added that the main criterion for choosing a suitable spouse was the family's reputation: "even if he only has little money we care the most about his family background". He cited a Syrian proverb to illustrate expectations in a future spouse: "Don't be afraid of someone who got hungry after he had been sated, instead fear the one who is sated after he was hungry (*La takhāf min al-shab 'ān idha jā 'a. khāf min al-jū 'ān idha shab 'a*)". According to this proverb, the poor man is not trustworthy while the noble man remains noble and keeps his manners

and morals, even if he encounters problems. Abū Māzin said that this proverb meant that the prospective spouse should not be from a poor family because he or she could turn out to be greedy once he or she had access to wealth. There is an immanent relation to class formation and frontiers that could be read into this proverb. The way Abū Māzin uses it describes a lack of trust and respect for people from a lower-class background, who are seemingly eternally marked by their poor background. In order to find out whether the family of the potential spouse fit the criteria and was suitable for marriage, fathers would ask around among neighbours and friends, Um Māzin explained. Again, Abū Māzin made use of a proverb to explain the situation to me: “Each person considers his colleague an idol”, meaning that one’s choice of friends and acquaintances speaks volumes about one’s morals, interests and educational background.

Abū Māzin’s ascription of utmost importance to the reputation of the groom’s family and the inquiry taking place in the social circle of the groom resonate with Rabo’s (2005: 80) finding that, among Aleppian traders, the family name, the name of the father, the quarter where one lives and where the father grew up establish a frame of reference by which the potential groom gets socially classified. The more that is known about the family of the groom or the bride, the more one is able to vouch for the character of the individual (*ibid.*: 90). Likewise, Salamandra (2004: 41) describes how the place of residence in Damascus is linked to the status of the people who inhabit it. What is described here is the individual’s ‘symbolic capital’ – assets like public acknowledgement, recognition and honour, perceived by others as “self-evident” and permanent (Bourdieu 1985: 731). Diane Reay (2004: 57/58), who engages in a feminist analysis of Bourdieu’s work, writes, “symbolic capital is manifested in individual prestige and personal qualities, such as authority and charisma”. A Syrian man can acquire these characteristics through his name, place of residence and his family’s reputation.

Certain aspects of the engagement process in Syria are entirely female-dominated. However, women only search for a potential bride on behalf of a marriageable bachelor, not vice versa (Stolleis 2004: 152). Girls and their mothers ought to wait for offers. If boys and girls find someone without the help of relatives, both families must be convinced of the suitability of the arrangement. Young men usually depend on the financial support of their fathers and the young woman’s family needs assurance that their daughter will have a standard of living similar to what she is accustomed to at home (Rabo 2005: 89/90). Um Māzin explained that usually it would be hinted to the mother of a son that there was a girl of marriageable age suitable for her son. Thereafter, the mother of the groom would go and meet the girl and her family.

“She makes an appointment by phone and then she goes to see the girl. When she enters, the girl brings her coffee. The girl offers the coffee to her, then, she leaves. [...] The mother of the groom returns to her house and tells her son that the family is good and the girl is pretty. Then, the mother makes another phone call and tells the other family: ‘I liked the situation. Can I bring my son to see her?’”.

After the first official encounter of bride and groom-to-be, both families make a deal about the *mahr* and how the couple will live. The *mahr* is a transaction from the groom and his household to the bride’s family. The amount is agreed on before the engagement and is paid before the wedding (Kastrinou 2016: 104). The *mahr* is usually divided into two parts: the first one is the prompt *mahr* (*muqaddam*) to be paid at the time of marriage, the second one is the deferred *mahr* (*mu’ajjal/mu’akhir*) that is paid upon the dissolution of the marriage by death or divorce (Fournier 2013: 141). The amount of the *mahr* is of great significance because it is commonly understood to confirm the ‘value’ of the bride (see Rabo 2005: 87).

In the case of Um Māzin’s daughter, the engagement period was introduced through *katb al-kitāb* (signing of the marriage contract). Afterwards, the couple had the chance to get to know each other: they went to cafés together and the groom visited the home of his future parents-in-law frequently. Over the time of the engagement, Um Māzin’s daughter received many gifts, such as gold jewellery, from her fiancé. Gift-giving, especially of gold, plays an important role in the context of marriage in most parts of the Arab world (see Singerman 2007; Moors 2003, Hoodfar 1997). The wedding process is then completed by the wedding party (*farah* in Egypt/‘urs in Syria) and the consummation of the marriage (*dukhla*). Similar wedding customs, habits and negotiations are described for Egypt (see Ghanam 2013; Hoodfar 1997) and other parts of the Middle East (e.g. Mundy 1995).

Firās, a married man in his mid-thirties, engaged in a discussion about his wedding with me when I met him through my friend Maḥmūd, who had invited Firās to help me with my research. Firās unexpectedly brought Yāsmīn along, who was approximately of the same age, even though I could only guess because she gave different hints about her situation, marital status and family background throughout our meeting. They had obviously met only recently. She did not know Firās’ actual name and called him ‘Ahmad’ throughout the conversation. Maḥmūd was irritated by her presence but tried to be a polite host. Over the course of the evening we spent together, I found out that Yāsmīn and Firās had met through their mutual search for a trafficker who could bring them across

the Mediterranean to Europe, where they were planning to seek asylum. Our conversation was guided by their countless questions about visa procedures in Germany but soon turned to their life in Syria. Yāsmīn, who was from a rural town in the east of Syria, frequently mocked Firās, who was from Damascus, for what she perceived as snobbery and an ignorance about life back in Syria. She related his unawareness to his class status and to the fact that he was born ‘with a silver spoon in his mouth’ (*huwwa mawlūd wa fī batmuhu mala ‘aqā min fidā*)<sup>5</sup> meaning that he was born rich and privileged. Firās said the following, regarding his wedding:

- Firās: My wedding was for a big amount of money: 120,000 Dollars. It was for the house, the *mahr* and everything else. When I got married, I bought a house in Damascus and I furnished it and I rented a wedding hall for 8,000 Dollars. For the honeymoon, we went to Turkey. So, all in all it was for 120,000 Dollars. I paid for everything. The woman in Damascus has a value, so she doesn’t pay for anything. She is more respected than the Egyptian woman...
- Yāsmīn: What do you mean? Are you saying that in [my hometown] they don’t value a girl?
- Firās: ... It was a family engagement. These are the old traditions. My mother went out to see girls and when she liked a girl she told me and then I went to see her. I was engaged for two years so we could get to know each other. At the beginning, she was a stranger to me so you should spend time with her to get to know her. After two years, we made the deal (*i ‘tamadnā*). Getting married in Damascus is very challenging.
- Yāsmīn: Is it a commercial thing? Is it marriage or trade?
- Firās: In these days, it has become a little bit like trade.
- Mahmūd: Yes, it became a trade in Syria. In Egypt, it is the same.

Firās’ account confirms the financial burden traditionally put on the shoulders of the groom’s family and also shows his pride in having been able to fulfil these expectations. His wealth and level of consumption play an important role in the way Firās described his wedding. Moreover, Firās directly relates the woman’s value to the man’s ability to pay for all the expenses and is challenged for this statement. Mahmūd told me after Firās and Yāsmīn had left that he was shocked by the amount of money his friend had spent.

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<sup>5</sup> In Syria, it is more common to say: “he was born with a golden spoon in his mouth” (*huwwa mawlūd wa fī batmuhu mala ‘aqā min dhahab*).

Where he comes from, he said, it used to be possible to think about marriage when a man had accumulated 2,000 Dollars.

According to Andrea Cornwall (2003: 493), being capable to consume and enable the woman to spend money have become highly significant in the context of love. Her young male interlocutors in Nigeria described that in order to sustain a relationship with a woman, they would need to spend considerable amounts on her. In their accounts, money served as a form of power that reiterated the discourse of man as the controller and provider. Likewise, young men in post-war Sierra Leone felt that they could only have a relationship if they could enable a woman to spend money on whatever she wanted. Without a secure income, they could not be in a lasting relationship and thus many of them decided to remain single in order to avoid the humiliation of being abandoned as a result of their inability to provide (Enria 2016: 143). In a similar vein, Firās highlights the importance of money and consumption if a man wanted to be a successful Syrian groom. Women are described accordingly to have different ‘values’ which depend on the amount of money men spent on them. Furthermore, their conversation, as well as Abū and Um Māzin’s words, speak to Schielke’s (2012: 136) argument that wealth and consumption translate into respect, recognition, and the promise of a good life and happiness in the context of Egypt. Consumption has become “the key register in which people judge various social relationships, most notably marriage and social standing” (*ibid.*) Through his wedding, Firās was able to claim respect and recognition for himself.

My conversations with Um and Abū Māzin and Firās, Yāsmīn and Maḥmūd brought to the forefront the significance of family reputation and background for a man’s ‘groom-ability’ and chances in the marriage market. Furthermore, the ability to spend is described as being of utmost importance if men aspire to prove their middle-class belonging and proper manhood in the marriage market.

### *Challenges to ‘groom-ability’ in Egypt*

Having focused on accounts of pre-war Syria’s engagement and marriage patterns, I now discuss changes in the marriage market observed by young Syrian men in Egypt. I was told that the first challenge in the process of getting married was related to meeting women. I met ‘Ayman, Wasīm’s friend, at the community centre in which Wasīm worked, who said: “The problem is that the people don’t know each other. The Syrians don’t meet each other, especially in some areas. Any Syrian man who is able to marry but

doesn't know any Syrians, won't get married. For sure, he won't marry an Egyptian woman". And Wasim added: "The problem is that the guys cannot meet the girls and at work they only meet Egyptian girls".

Likewise, Qutayba stressed that he had observed a change in the way Syrian men and women got to know each other in Egypt. Qutayba was in his early twenties, worked as an IT adviser in an international institute and had lots of friends from abroad. He was not looking for a spouse when I met him, but believed that in Egypt there was the possibility to meet and fall in love with a woman "just like it happens in the movies". In Cairo, young Syrian men and women could meet and get to know each other in the workplace, and in the streets, cafés or restaurants, he told me enthusiastically. They would meet, fall in love, and tell the family later. He considered it positive that, due to displacement, families were scattered over various countries and could no longer uphold the tradition of choosing a spouse. While it was not uncommon in Syria to marry one's cousin or someone else from the extended family, this also became more difficult, since families were spread over various countries, he explained.

Akram, in contrast to Qutayba, wanted to get married and did not welcome the fact that he could not rely on his relatives' judgement and recommendation in the process of finding a potential spouse. He was a primary school teacher in his late twenties from a small city in the north of Syria and told me how he got engaged to his fiancée. The first challenge was to be sure that the woman he liked had 'good' morals:

"If I want to marry a girl, I should ask about her and her family, as I told you, to find out if she is from a good family. Before I get engaged to her, I should know her morals, if she is good or not, and also if her brothers are good. So, I talked with her frankly".

Even though it was not the usual way of getting to know a woman, Akram decided that, due to the absence of his family, he had to speak to the woman he liked in order to be able to judge whether they could have a future together. Once he was convinced that she was a suitable spouse for him, he introduced himself to her father. That they were not from the same region was reason enough for her father to initially resist. However, his father-in-law knew someone from Akram's hometown and could therefore inquire about his background. Because Akram was working as a teacher in the very same school that his father-in-law had founded in Egypt, his father-in-law used the opportunity to observe his behaviour for a while.

In addition to being accepted by his in-laws, the negotiations about the *mahr* between Akram and his father-in-law were complicated, because his father-in-law did not know the financial background of Akram's family. Akram explained:

"[...] she [the potential bride] should be a girl from my place. Her father would know who I am, because in the village the people know each other. They would say this is the son of so and so and they are good people. So, he might agree. You can give what you have in terms of money and it will be fine. ...It's the issue that I told you before regarding the origin of people and the family so and so... this is lost here in Egypt".

Akram identified the main challenge during his marriage negotiations as the fact that he was away from his hometown, his comfort zone, where people knew him and his family background.

His father-in-law initially requested 75,000 LE (in 2015 approximately 9,700 US Dollars) arguing that his daughter's cousin had got married for the same amount and that he did not want his daughter to feel less worthy. However, Akram could not afford this amount and because his father-in-law knew that his daughter loved Akram, they eventually agreed on 50,000 LE (approximately 6,500 US Dollars). Looking back, even though he perceived the process of getting engaged in Egypt as challenging, Akram found a positive aspect:

"All the people here are in the same situation. We all became refugees (*muhājir*) and displaced (*musharrad*). The person who was rich has lost all his money and became poor, and the poor is still poor, so all the people are now in the same class. It was like melting and all are now in the same container. This is a positive factor that we found here in Egypt".

Describing himself as being from the "normal class or middle class in Syria", Akram believed that if they had not been displaced but had met in Syria, his father-in-law would have rejected him, because of the class differences between the two families. His father-in-law was rich and had many real-estate properties that had been destroyed in the war; in Egypt, his father-in-law was, as Akram said, "just like us".

Likewise, Wasīm described how some families had lowered their standards to accept a potential groom as a result of being displaced: "there are some families that make it easier to marry in terms of expectations. There is no problem. We're all refugees, we're the same. However, there are some people who believe that they still live in Syria". Both descriptions echo an argument by Simon Turner (1999: 7), who conducted research

among Burundian refugees in a camp in Tanzania. He concluded that the unknown length of the liminal situation refugees encounter opened up the possibility for some of them to transgress norms and customs that are usually taken for granted. Their accounts also speak to literature that engages with changes in marriage patterns in times of uncertainty and hardship. According to Aitemad Muhanna (2013: 118), marriage decisions and dowry payments started to transform during the demanding years of livelihood crisis in Gaza after the second Intifada. They were shaped by giving priority to calculations of material and social advantages rather than to tradition (*ibid.*: 125). Likewise, Jane Kani Edward (2007: 98) found that among southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo culturally accepted ways of conducting marriages were altered during displacement. Family background became irrelevant when women in Cairo married across ethnic and racial lines and the absence of close family members in Egypt meant that marriages were increasingly witnessed by distant relatives or friends. The payment of bride wealth tended to be postponed until times of peace in the home country.

Coming back to Akram's process of getting engaged, he ended his story with the following sentence: "In Syria, the people used to know each other and if I had stayed in my village, I would have married someone from there. Here, I don't know the different cities or the people. This is the difference between Syria and Egypt". Akram was both hampered and advantaged by the renegotiation of class and status due to forced displacement. He faces difficulties because his father-in-law misrecognises him and his financial situation. However, at the same time he sees a potential for change and a new form of solidarity and equality in the misrecognition of one's former status.

Dāwūd, a man in his mid-thirties, experienced that the differences of opinions regarding politics that fragmented the Syrian society since the uprising had entered marriage negotiations. When I met Dāwūd for the first time, he had just got engaged and was eager to share his story with me. He lived in Cairo with his older sister and when he saw his fiancée in a restaurant he went to talk to her and managed to get her father's phone number and asked for her hand, thus living what was described by Qutayba as the 'movie-like' way of meeting one's partner. The negotiations were challenging and were about to fail because Dāwūd, even though he had lived in Damascus for a long time, was not originally from Damascus, which his potential family-in-law was. Dāwūd recalled that it was an advantage that he had picked up the Damascene accent. His description thus illustrates that the significance of the Damascene/non-Damascene and the urban/rural divide, described by Salamandra (2004: 12) and Rabo (2012: 83) is still relevant. The negotiations further included an inquiry about his political views. His father-in-law asked

him about his opinions regarding the uprising in Syria and Dāwūd remembered that he tried his best to guess what his father-in-law would appreciate as an answer, wondering whether he was with or against the regime. Furthermore, he was conscious of the fact that his unstable financial situation in Egypt could make marriage problematic. In contrast to Syria, where Dāwūd possessed all the assets necessary to marry, such as a car, a flat and a good employment, in Egypt, he rented a flat in Egypt and his work was not secure. In Syria, he could have asked for any girl's hand, he told me confidently, but in Egypt he had to hope for her and her family's sympathy and understanding about his financial situation. Despite all his worries, Dāwūd's father-in-law accepted him and once they had agreed about the *mahr*, Dāwūd's family in Syria and the in-laws in Cairo talked via skype and then Dāwūd and his fiancée read the *fātiha* (first *sūra* of the Quran) as a confirmation of their engagement.

### ***Not being 'groom' enough***

Mahmūd was in a similar situation to the young Syrian men introduced above. He had been looking for a bride for over a year and had tried one through a variety of ways: he asked his Syrian acquaintances to act as matchmakers; he posted an ad about himself in a Facebook group that was designed for Syrians of marriageable age in Egypt; and he asked his uncle, who also lived in Cairo, to find him a bride. In his search, he had already met various families and was used to the different questions he had to answer: he was asked about his political views, his religious beliefs und practice, and about his future plans. One family he visited wanted to know whether he was planning to flee to Europe. When he replied that he was not, "the mother raised her eyebrow and asked me if I had no ambitions", he remembered.

One time, I met Mahmūd after a potential bride and her family had just rejected him. The woman was twenty-nine years old, which was far beyond what was considered the marriageable age for women, he told me angrily, but she was educated and had a similar interest in tourism, which had convinced Mahmūd to meet her. However, she and her family doubted his morals and religiosity because Mahmūd was in regular touch with foreign women due to being a tour guide. Mahmūd was outraged that a woman of her age demanded that he should change his profession and shouted angrily: "The Syrian women who are in Egypt deserve to be treated like the girls in Zaatari Camp, where men come to pay the families to marry and exploit them". Generally, Mahmūd felt that it was unfair

that so many women he met in Egypt were hesitant, demanding and arrogant, even though he assured me that he ought to be considered a good match with his career, language skills, relatively assured income, savings and high education. What increased his anger was the fact that most of the women who rejected him had in his opinion nothing to offer, since he considered them neither beautiful nor young enough. His outrage and call for women to learn to appreciate what they had in Egypt are evocative of the feeling of misrecognition and status loss he felt whenever he was rejected by a potential spouse and her family. According to Charles Taylor (1994: 25) misrecognition can cause severe damage to the individual's self-esteem:

“a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being”.

Taylor's argument can lay the foundation for contextualising Maḥmūd's outburst of anger after he felt misjudged, misunderstood and misvalued by a potential bride and her family.

Likewise, ‘Abd al-Rahman, who had got married to a Palestinian-Syrian woman in Egypt the year before, observed a change in perceptions of marriage among Syrian families and in their expectations of a groom. He compared what men had to pay in Syria before the outbreak of the civil war and how they got married in exile in Egypt.

“[The bride] was always dreaming about her soul mate, who will come to her on his white horse and she doesn't agree to get married unless [the groom] is a doctor or an engineer. When the revolution started, many young men were killed and many others took up arms so the number of men decreased. Before the revolution, people were giving around 200,000 or 300,000 Syrian Lira<sup>6</sup> in gold to the bride. However, since the revolution only the ring is enough even without the white dress that the girl has always dreamed about. [...] The important thing is that you take good care of the bride”.

Indeed, the photographs ‘Abd al-Rahman shared with me that were taken on his wedding day showed him and his bride in a living room with about ten guests. His wife told me later that her impressive wedding dress was only rented for that day.

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<sup>6</sup> Before 2011, this was approximately 4,000 US Dollars and 6,000 US Dollars.

‘Abd al-Rahman’s account suggests that the expectations that Syrian women and their families had of potential grooms used to be considerably more ambitious, and had come to be reined in through the experience of displacement. He even mocked women for their unrealistic expectations and appeared to feel satisfaction and a sense of justice knowing that women could not ask for as much as they used to in Syria. His complaints about women’s expectations resonate with one of Rebecca Joubin’s (2013a) findings, which are based on her in-depth analysis of Syrian *musalsalāt* (TV series). Many Syrian soap operas, she observes, pick up on the topic of marriage, highlighting the difficulties young Syrian men face because of the on-going economic crisis before the uprising and their consequent inability to fulfil social expectations. In several *musalsalāt* women were blamed for these high demands. Joubin (*ibid.*) describes an episode in which the newly-wed protagonist becomes impotent due to the high wedding debts and his wife’s expectations. He consults a doctor, who prescribes medication that repairs his ‘hurt dignity’.

‘Abd al-Rahman was not the only one who argued that Syrian men’s absence, due to their death or because they were fighting, would change the meaning of marriage and engagement with a Syrian man. After I share with Rāfi that a Syrian friend of mine had been left by his fiancée, he told me that a woman who would break up with a Syrian man was *ghabiyya* (stupid) for letting him go, since there were no Syrian men left. He told me firmly that she was to be blamed if the relationship did not work out, since she ought to be aware that the number of Syrian men had decreased. Likewise, Qutayba was convinced that not only in Egypt but also back in Syria the number of women ready to get married was bigger than the number of men and thus, women should demand less from a Syrian groom.

That several Syrian men I met blamed women for being picky or too demanding suggests that these men had felt ‘not good enough’ and humiliated at some point of their search for a spouse. Being in Egypt without their family, without the reputation they used to have in their hometown, and having lost what would have made them a favoured match in Syria, seemed to exacerbate the feeling of ‘hurt dignity’ that Joubin (*ibid.*) identified as an important theme in Syrian *musalsalāt* and explains the rigour and anger expressed by Rāfi, Maḥmūd and ‘Abd al-Rahman. The loss of social context and the consequent misrecognition appear to equal loss of one’s identity, since these men could no longer rely on their family name or origin. The man’s ‘frame of reference’ (Rabo 2005: 80), namely his father’s name, the quarter he lives in and the family’s history, is nullified in Cairo, which leaves men without solid proof of their identity. These men’s inner state of

anger and frustration can be described by using Bourdieu and Wacquant's metaphor of the 'fish in water':

"Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu and Wacquant: 1992:127).

As long as these men remained in their comfort zone, where their name and background were known and their class status was valued, they did not feel the burden of marriage. It only turned into a severe challenge when they could not take their position at home for granted anymore. According to Reay et al. (2009: 1105), who apply the opposite metaphor of a 'fish being out of water' to the context of working-class students in elite universities, when habitus encounters an unfamiliar situation, the "resulting disjunctions can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty". In a similar vein, I suggest that Syrian men began to feel like 'fish out of water' during forced displacement in Egypt. They sensed insecurity and uncertainty when forced to question what made them attractive grooms in Syria and directed their anger at women's unrealisable expectations in them.

### ***Marriage and economic capital***

Several young Syrian men I met explicitly voiced yet another challenge in the context of getting married. They told me that getting married in Egypt had to be delayed until they could afford it. The prospect of getting married was directly related to finding work and graduation from university as described by Fādī in a recent conversation we had via social media. He told me the following: "I want to get married, Magdalena. If only I could complete my studies (*bidī atzawaj yā Magdalena. Yā rab aqadir kamil dirāstī*)". Fādī works long hours to support his family and thus had to interrupt his studies. Furthermore, he cannot afford to pay 1,000 Dollars per year to continue studying engineering in Cairo. Hence, he is thinking about working in a second job in the evening after his eight-hour shift at his parents' shop, to be able to accumulate the university fees. For Fādī, there is a direct connection between completing his education and being ready to get married. In a similar vein, Dāwūd described the challenges for young men:

“There is a sadness and difficulty like: ‘I don’t have an income, I cannot find a job, I cannot pay my rent, I cannot marry, I cannot send money to my family...’. The people are not anymore like they were in the past. Maybe the crisis made young men very old before they should have become old”.

The inability to move on with one’s life caused distress and discontent among many Syrian men, while others tried to present it as a simple equation: even though they would have thought about getting married at this point of their lives in Syria, under the new circumstances, marriage had to be delayed, and work and securing one’s future took priority. Māzin said:

“If I were still in Syria I would have thought about [marriage] by now, but here it’s difficult. I don’t know if I am staying here and also economically it’s difficult. I cannot do it until I know that I will stay in one country and that I have work and make money”.

Displacement, unemployment and insecurity about one’s future prospects meant that marriage had to be postponed indefinitely until one’s life was normalised.

It is important to contextualise the temporal aspect of Māzin’s statement. Due to the recentness of the Syrian civil war, the consequent displacement, uncertainty about the war’s outcome and the stability of the whole region, he does not feel able to think about marriage. He does not know what the near future brings and unless there is a minimal form of stability in his life he feels that he cannot make such a commitment. In essence, Māzin’s situation speaks to an argument put forward by Fiddian-Qasmiyah and Qasmiyah (2010: 308): one of their interlocutors suffered as a result of the direct relation between his legal status and his love life. His uncertain legal status limited his potential to be a boyfriend or become a spouse due to the UK laws at the time. In Māzin’s and Bashār’s cases, which I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, it was not the legal status that determined their personal life, but their insecure economic situation and instability in Egypt.

Overall, the stories that were shared with me often reminded me of the myth of Sisyphus (see Camus [1955] 1979), who is forced by the gods to put all his effort into pushing a stone up a mountain before it rolls back down and Sisyphus must start all over again. The torture is, according to Camus, that Sisyphus is deeply aware of the “whole extent of his wretched condition” (*ibid.*: 109). In a similar vein, Syrian bachelors had to begin anew to accumulate the capital they needed if they wanted to get married in Egypt. Often, they had already gathered this capital back in Syria, such as a flat of their own, a

stable job and a car. However, in Egypt, the stone they had struggled to push up the mountain had rolled quickly down and they needed to again gather together the economic resources to get married. Similarly, they had to find a way to reinstall their status and give weight and credibility to their reputation that was once an intrinsic part of their identity.

### ***Syrian women marrying Egyptian men***

Many Syrian men I talked to shared with me their concern about marriages between Syrian women and Egyptian men, which were commonly assumed to take place. During my fieldwork, I met and talked to one Syrian woman who had married an Egyptian, but, according to the gossip I heard, there was a sizeable number of women who had recently married Egyptian men. For Syrian men, women's ability to choose a groom not only among Syrian but also among Egyptian men, seemed to cause a form of stress related to being forced to compete with Egyptian men to win Syrian women's favour. Their once solid position in a patriarchal system of gender relations appeared to be in question by the presence of more men among whom Syrian women could choose.

Qutayba experienced that Egyptian men, such as taxi drivers and even his former professor, asked him about a Syrian woman they could marry. Such a question was usually phrased as offering 'help' to Syrian women and their families. Qutayba did not appreciate such offers usually answering: "You don't help us, you only try to find a cheap opportunity to marry". He heard of families who had to accept "cheap" marriage proposals because of their devastating financial situations. Likewise, Wasīm recalled that Egyptians came to the community centre to ask about Syrian girls that they could marry, using the rhetoric of help: "We got angry and we answered in anger", he remembered. According to Nūr, 2012 was the year in which Syrian women were "sold" to Egyptian husbands for 2,000 LE (approximately 200 US Dollars in 2015). She recalled that there were offices in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City that functioned as agencies, in which women were 'advertised' for marriage to Egyptian men. However, she remembered that Syrian men had put an end to this by destroying those places in rage and anger, forcing the marriage brokers to stop selling Syrian women.

Fatma, the head of a school for Syrian children, said the following when I asked her about Egyptian men trying to get marry Syrian women:

"they are always after [the Syrian women]. They feel that in this crisis they are ready to get married for nothing. But it's not right. [...] Most Syrian families don't

want to have an Egyptian man among them. Maybe in the Facebook groups you noticed that they write: ‘Syrian girls are only for Syrian boys!’ [...] At the beginning there was somebody, I don’t want to mention her name, who used to help those women who were raped in Syria to get married here. [...] she helps those girls to get married to Syrians, Egyptians, to whomever....”.

Fatma welcomed marriage to Egyptian men only if Syrian women, due to being dishonoured by rape, did not have any chances on the marriage market anymore – Egyptian men were in that case better than no marriage at all. Syrian women’s marriage to Egyptian men seemed to be a second-class choice for Syrian women, who, due to a ‘stigma’, would not be favoured by the majority of Syrian (middle-class) men.

Most of my interlocutors were furious when they talked with me about the topic of intermarriages between Syrian women and Egyptian men, and Qutayba, when referring to “us”, suggested that it was not about individual cases, but rather about the ‘us/them’ binary and that women belonged to the Syrian community. He confirms an argument put forward by Nira Yuval-Davis and Marcel Stoetzler (2002: 340), who state that women are commonly constructed as “symbolic boundary guards of the collectivity and as representing the collectivity’s honour”. In a similar vein, Peteet (2005: 186) argues that gender was used as a real and symbolic marker of community among Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Palestinian women were advised not to marry Lebanese men, who were described as unfaithful and less committed to their families than Palestinian men.

Mirjana Morokvasic-Müller (2004: 135/136) conceptualises interethnic marriages in the former Yugoslavia after 1991 as a living proof of the possibility to live with each other despite ethnic differences. While intermarriage can be considered a bridge between communities, it may equally be conceived as disruption of the social order, of the reproduction of the family, and of ethnic identities. Consequently, a woman who marries outside of her group, challenges the idea of women symbolising the nation, and is considered as lost to her community (*ibid.*: 137). The critique Syrian men voiced toward marriages between Syrian women and Egyptian men seems to be similarly related to these women’s disruption of the ‘us/them’ binary and to being ‘lost’ to the Syrian community.

If men tried to explain to me why Syrian women and Egyptian men got married, it was commonly argued that Egyptian men were attracted to Syrian women because they were neater, cleaner, better cooks and more beautiful than Egyptian women. In this context, many Syrian men claimed that a marriage to Egyptian women was for them unthinkable. They perceived them usually as loud, aggressive and even violent against

their husbands. Rāfi’s brother Malik told me once half-serious, half-joking that his neighbours were an Egyptian couple and at night he would only hear the woman shouting and screaming. Her husband in the meantime would never say a word. He wondered whether his neighbour was a real man after all and whether he would not only be screamed at but also be beaten by his wife.

Furthermore, it was often assumed that Syrian women married Egyptian men only because they needed protection and financial aid. The emphasis was on single women’s economic conditions that forced them to marry Egyptian men. Hānī had an ambivalent opinion about the topic:

“It’s both positive and negative. If there is a woman and she really needs help and you as a man can help her, and if you like her and you want to marry her, it’s positive because you decide to stay with her all your life and to take care of her. But the negative thing is if someone wants to marry her only because he wants to give her a certain amount of money. This would be more like buying her, especially if he treats her like a slave and feels that he can leave her any time he wants. I can say that there is a phenomenon of taking advantage of Syrians”.

For Hānī the marriage of a Syrian woman with an Egyptian man was acceptable if the man proved to have good morals and the best intentions. Again, Syrian women are fixed in a static version of femininity – they are considered helpless without the support of a man, which makes getting married to an Egyptian man acceptable.

### *A woman’s perspective*

When volunteering as an English teacher in a community centre, I met Suhayr, a mother of four who got divorced from her husband shortly before the uprising in Syria. Fatma introduced me to her and henceforth I taught her three daughters. Suhayr came to Egypt and tried to support her family by working as a hairdresser. When I first visited the family in their small flat I was introduced to Shihāb, an Egyptian man in his thirties, who Suhayr’s five-year-old son referred to as *baba* (dad). In contrast to his uncomplicated and trusting way of dealing with Shihāb, his three sisters, all of them teenagers, were stiff and reserved and kept their headscarves on whenever he was around. Suhayr seemed to be initially embarrassed, but eventually told me how she and Shihāb had met and that he already had an Egyptian wife. For this reason, Shihāb could only contribute a small amount to the family’s income and rarely spent more than a couple of hours in Suhayr’s

flat. His presence and financial contributions nevertheless seemed to ease the situation. It allowed Suhayr not to have to work such long hours in the salon, and she could stay at home and focus on the household and her youngest child, while her older children went to school. She told me that the occasional presence of a man in the household gave her a feeling of safety.

My personal contact with Suhayr was sporadic, but Fatma kept me updated. Once she told me that the family had a crisis because Shihāb had found one of Suhayr's daughters on the streets with her friends in the evening. This had caused a big fight because Shihāb considered this behaviour immoral and inappropriate. Despite the ongoing tension between Shihāb and Suhayr's daughters, Fatma told me that she tried to convince Suhayr to accept her husband's issues assuring her that "having a husband like him was better than not having one at all". She told me that she had calmed Suhayr down after the fight saying that Shihāb was obviously only concerned about the girls' reputation. In Fatma's opinion, Shihāb's presence was priceless because he knew what was accepted behaviour and what was inappropriate in Egypt. Fatma thus seemed to suggest that a woman in Suhayr's situation could only benefit from marrying an Egyptian man, since he could give her guidance, security and protection. In summer 2015, I heard the rumour that Suhayr and Shihāb's marriage had not lasted and that Suhayr and her children had moved to another part of town. When I met Suhayr in her new flat in December 2015, she confirmed that Shihāb had divorced her after his first wife became pregnant with their first child. For Suhayr, this was a devastating experience. "We didn't divorce in a fight, nevertheless, he disappeared from my life", she explained. It left her sad and with the only option of moving to a new place, where rents were cheaper and she could hope for support from the various NGOs there.

There is literature that deals with the cases of refugee women getting married to men in their host country. Marina de Regt (2010: 113) finds that Somali women who are in Yemen without a male relative are eager to get married, hoping that it will relieve them from taking on paid work, increase their social status and protect them from sexual harassment. In a Guinean refugee camp, a new form of marriage – Bulgur marriage – was prominent as a strategy to negotiate unstable situations and available resources (Gale 2007: 357). This new form of consensual union is not officially sanctioned and allows the partners in the union to be in several relationships at once. It represents a new form of kinship, provides women with agency, protection, economic security and companionship. It is a strategic alliance to handle daily life in the camp and improve both partners' economic position (*ibid.*: 371). However, a Bulgur marriage can come with great cost as

it may not be approved by relatives or elders in the camp and defies community norms. What is suggested in both articles is that marriage becomes a protective shield for women, a way to improve their social status and economic situation, however, this does not always come without disadvantages and thus women need to evaluate carefully what is their best option. In the two articles, as in Suhayr's case, women are in precarious positions, where they are displaced and decide to marry, which does not leave much room for negotiations.

Nevertheless, not only refugee women look to marriage for protection and improvement of their situation. Jane Kani Edward (2007: 96), who worked with southern Sudanese refugees in Egypt, observed that in several cases Sudanese men began approaching women for marriage if these women were recognised by the UNHCR and consequently had a chance to be relocated. This process was not one-directional and rumours in the community said that single women also tried to be relocated by being added to the file of a recognised man through marriage, albeit to a lesser extent.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has looked at Syrian men's position in the marriage market during displacement. If men encountered economic instability in Egypt it could threaten their position in the marriage market. There was a direct connection between one's economic status and one's chances of getting married. Young men realised their loss and responded with fury to the misrecognition they experienced. Another challenge was related to young men's inability to make their former status travel with them to Egypt. Hence, it was extremely difficult to convince potential spouses and their families of their middle-class background and respected masculinity. Again, Syrian young men frequently reacted with anger and fury to the constant rejection they experienced on the part of potential brides and their families.

I have illustrated in this chapter that displacement opens the potential for new class formations and renegotiations of class and status, but also potential for misrecognition. Most young men willing to get married had to reinvent themselves anew as grooms, the work of Sisyphus, since it usually meant that they needed to find a way to prove that they should be perceived as dignified, proper middle-class grooms. In the struggle for reclaiming one's economic and social groomability, several Syrian men blamed women's extreme expectations as a way to gloss over the fact that they could not fulfil them.

Even if rarely on the surface, this chapter also dealt with love. Men recognised that a woman's love was dependent on their economic position and they tried to negotiate their own expectations of love. This was obvious when Mahmūd met women he did not feel attracted to, simply because he finally wanted to get married, and his final relief and outburst of emotions when a woman he actually loved accepted him as her husband.

Another challenge Syrian men felt confronted with was Egyptian men's interest in 'their' Syrian women and the potential 'loss' of Syrian women to the Egyptian 'other' men. In this case, Syrian men doubted Egyptian men's intentions, love and feelings. The discussion of the 'boundaries' of the Syrian community, in this case, Syrian women who married non-Syrian men, functions as a door opener to in-depth analysis of who was defined as 'Syrian' and if there was a Syrian 'community' in Egypt – themes I will engage with in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 5 – *Of Anger, Hate and Estrangement*** **or Establishing a living among several ‘others’ in Egypt**

Towards the end of my fieldwork, Muhannad invited me to meet his father so that I could ask him questions about Syria. I met Abū Muhannad in his drugstore where he asked me to follow him to his office. There, I was seated on a small chair in a corner while he sat down behind his huge, dark-wooden desk, which provided him with a sense of authority. Abū Muhannad, whose voice was often filled with rage and anger when he talked about his life in Syria, argued that sectarian affiliations could not be overlooked anymore after all that had happened since 2011. “How can you ignore if members of another sect are responsible for the death of your relatives and friends?”, he asked me furiously from behind his desk. He used his momentary authority in the room to try to sternly convince me of the sectarian character of the conflict.

Likewise, Maḥmūd once expressed his anger to me about Syrians belonging to other sects. Outraged, he said that he could not understand how Syrian Christians denied the situation in Syria and continued to sympathise with and support the Assad regime. Agitated, he told me: “I don’t have any respect for the other minorities anymore!”. He assured me that he had tried for a long time to remain neutral and objective, but he could not retain this attitude anymore when witnessing the injustice and condemnations the Sunnis in Syria experienced in contrast to the other minorities. Another time, when we talked about a conversation I had had with an acquaintance of mine, who had a pacifist attitude regarding the ongoing civil war, Maḥmūd told me: “If we have people talking like this, we will not succeed. If there is an Alawi on the street, you have to kill him immediately. No one can convince me that Shias and Alawites are good people!”. Maḥmūd was not an impulsive man. Rarely did I hear him swearing or shouting. Usually, he had a smile on his face. Only when we talked about what Syria had become did his face turn pale and his features harden.

This chapter concerns the construction of ‘self’ and ‘others’. I begin with a discussion of sectarianism (*al-tā’ifiyya*), a pressing theme and one of several aspects of life in Syria that migrated to Egypt with Syrian men and impacted on their lives there. Many Syrian men in Egypt shared with me their experiences of sectarianism, sectarian conflict and its absence in Syrian society, and they reflected on how sectarianism interfered with their present situation in Egypt and their future. While it is obvious that sectarianism is an important theme in understanding the situation of recently displaced

people fleeing from a war-torn, fractured country, I argue that living with sectarianism should also be understood as a crucial aspect influencing masculinity. Having been confronted for one's whole life with injustice based on a system of sectarian preferences affects men (just as it affects women). It means experiencing multiple pressures, fears and the confrontation with unfair yet unchangeable power structures if one is not part of the most powerful sect. In some situations, it means silently accepting unjust treatment; in others, it means adapting to be able to make one's life easier. Understanding identity as intersectional, sectarianism should be seen as one of the markers that create (masculine) selves.

In the second part of the chapter, the focus shifts to the relation between Syrians and Egyptians. In order to describe Syria's ties with the Egyptian host society, Syrian men often referred to the historical period of the United Arabic Republic (UAR). Another defining incident that was described to mark these relations was the Rabaa Square massacre in 2013 and its aftermath. Through narratives focusing on the UAR and Rabaa Square, not only perception of the host society can be analysed but also processes of inclusion and exclusion in the Syrian community. Moreover, I scrutinise the specific strategies Syrians used to distance themselves from the Egyptians. Emphasising Syria's former wealth, work ethic, and the quality of Syrian products was a tactic many Syrian men used to create distance from the Egyptian 'others'. When defining a specific ideal notion of Syrianness, Syrians I talked to – men and women alike – appeared to simultaneously create an ideal of Syrian middle-class manhood.

The construction of an ideal image of Syrianness vis-à-vis the Egyptians stands in sharp contrast to the often-expressed feeling of 'victimhood' that displacement enforced on many Syrians, and which I will describe at the end of this chapter, evoking in them a feeling of inability to hold up the ideals of Syrian middle-class masculinity.

### ***Embedding constructions of 'self' and 'other' theoretically***

Given the fragility, ambivalence and incompleteness of what was described as the Syrian community, it is crucial not to fall into the common trap of analysing people in exile as logically belonging to a unified, homogeneous, essentialised community based on a common culture, history, similar experiences and longings, but to rather question what constitutes community in a specific context and why and how it came into being. Salih (2003: 118) problematises the perception of migrants belonging to homogeneous

communities neatly defined by ethnicity. She highlights that research on migration and displacement needs to pay attention instead to the various, contradictory and changing negotiations of boundaries of the community. She thus directs the focus on the migrant as an active agent, who includes and excludes, redefines ‘self’ and ‘other’ based on the context of the everyday, and constructs and deconstructs shared cultural and social identities (*ibid.*: 120). Importantly, Salih (*ibid.*: 131) also mentions the existence of “many others” rather than assuming the presence of a homogeneous entity against which identity is constructed in the context of migration and displacement. In a similar vein, Peteet (2005: 185) stresses that a major aspect of modern Palestinian national identity and subjectivity is formulated against several ‘others’, personified in the case of the Palestinians in refugee camps in Lebanon by the Israelis and the Lebanese host population.

As far as masculinity in sectarian contexts is concerned, there is a remarkable absence of scholarly engagement with the interconnection of these topics. Material from which to draw a comparison, even though it is not a sectarian context like Lebanon, Syria or Iraq, can be found in the study of men and masculinities among the Palestinian minority in Israel. According to Sa’ar and Yahia-Younis (2008: 313), in a context in which direct routes to hegemonic masculinity, for instance via military service, are not available, the development of alternative versions of hegemonic masculinities takes place. Among those alternative forms are devout Islamic masculinity, the pursuit of secondary education, and football. The authors also suggest that the structural violence experienced by Palestinian men living in Israel leads to a crisis of masculinity and an increase in violent forms of masculinity (*ibid.*: 322). This article, despite being quite static in its methodology and conclusion, can give a hint to possible consequences of living in a society, in which most paths towards masculine accomplishments are blocked. Likewise, Monterescu (2006: 124), whose work I mentioned in the introduction, focuses on the Palestinian minority in Israel, arguing that it exhibits a process of fragmentation into local, religious, and regional-fractional sub-identities. During interviews with Palestinians in Israel, he realised that ‘multiple’, ‘dual’, ‘split’, and ‘paradoxical identity’ were recurring terms and themes (*ibid.*: 126). He stresses that in a heterogeneous place like Yafa, the usually clear-cut dichotomy between insider and outsider, us and them, self and other, is not clearly defined. This state undermines the spatial ordering of the world since it creates an “incongruity between the ‘real’ world of inferior socio-economic and political status and the ‘ideal’ world of proud Arabness and patriarchal manhood” (*ibid.*: 129). Monterescu’s main argument is that hegemonic masculinity is deconstructed as a

coherent, solid category of identity. Instead, masculinity is contradictory, manoeuvres between various discourses, and manipulates them if needed (*ibid.*: 134). What emerges is a situational masculinity that is consciously uncommitted, and dynamic, moving between various identity components (*ibid.*: 137).

Encouraged by this literature and inspired by my fieldwork, I assume that living in a system of sectarian injustice and oppression can be an obstruction to reaching the aspired, ideal form of masculinity for men, who do not belong to the dominant or favoured group in society. Consequently, their masculinity needs to be elastic and dynamic, able to absorb damage since it emerges, at least partially, out of humiliating experiences with the powerful groups and the search for alternative versions of masculinity.

### ***Introducing sectarianism***

Among Syrian men I met in Egypt an important signifier of being Syrian was to emphasise that one was not Shia or Alawi. I suggest this was the case because there was a strong rejection of these religious groups, which can be detected in Mahmūd's account above. I assume that another reason is that the official state religion in Egypt is Sunni Islam and that there are prejudices, legal discrimination and state repression against other faith groups, such as Copts and Shia (El-Badawy 2016; Rieffer-Flanagan 2016). According to journalistic articles by the Egyptian news portals *MadaMasr* (Rollins 2015) and *AhramOnline* (El-Gundy 2013) and scholarly writings (see Abou-El-Fadl 2015: 212), there have been several cases of religious defamation against and persecution of Muslim Shia, as well as atheists and Copts in Egypt since 2011. Very occasionally I met Syrian Christians, but the majority of my contacts presented themselves to me as Sunnis.

Even though I did not specifically ask about their experiences with sectarianism, the topic was brought up in one way or another in various conversations. Many Syrians highlighted the absence of sectarianism during their lives in Syria before the uprising. They stressed that sectarianism only became an issue with the beginning of the uprising in 2011, and usually combined this narrative with a story about their childhood when they used to play with children of different religious backgrounds and had good relations with neighbours belonging to a different religion. Furthermore, many Syrians stressed that it had not been common to ask people about their religious affiliation. However, I was told that this had changed since the beginning of the uprising in 2011. In addition, I sensed a strong anti-Alawi sentiment among most Syrians I met and I suggest that this was based

on the assumption that Alawites benefitted from an unfair and illegitimate link with power that granted them privileges in various aspects of their life in Syria.

Researchers give various, often contradicting answers as to whether Syria before the uprising should be understood as a sectarian society, and if so, how this sectarianism can be defined and understood. Taking on a rather primordialist position, political scientist Nikolaos van Dam (2011: 165) follows the assumption that sectarianism is a signifier of actions and behaviour. Likewise, historian Elizabeth Picard (1996: 9 cited in Schmoller 2016: 422) argues that membership in a community affects individuals deeply and creates firm solidarities. In contrast, several researchers describe sectarianism as an outcome rather than a cause of political struggle (see Rabo 2012: 91). Kastrinou (2016: 7) analyses sectarianism in Syria by setting it in its historical context. She argues, following Ussama Makdisi (2000), that the violence in 1860 in Mount Lebanon turned its inhabitants into political subjects and created a specific form of active political subjectivity based on religious affiliation (*ibid.*: 10). Sectarianism occurred when local forms of identity were politicised and essentialised to function as representation between citizen and state (*ibid.*: 12). Similarly, Peteet (2011: 16) stresses that sect and ethnicity are not preordained categories and their emergence and configuration are influenced by state-religious relations, external interventions, war, and displacement. Furthermore, she advises paying attention to the role sectarianism plays during forced displacement giving the example of Shia refugees from Iraq being turned back at the Jordanian border because of their sectarian affiliation (*ibid.*: 19). Here, she thus provides a reason why Syrians in Egypt might have chosen to highlight their belonging to Sunni Islam. Likewise, historian Christian Schmoller (2016: 420) directs the focus to the use of sectarianism among Syrian Christians during displacement in Austria, suggesting that sectarianism is context-dependent and “a discursive construct remodelled and readopted in narratives about war, refuge, integration and belonging”. His research thus allows us to contend that sectarian affiliation becomes a strategic tool during displacement.

In the military-led regime that governed Syria for the past decades, the Alawi minority held key positions of power in Syrian politics, economy, and the military. By 1955, around sixty-five per cent of the Non-Commissioned Officers in the Syrian military were Alawites and there was a disproportionate representation of Alawites among ordinary soldiers (Sluglett 2016: 41). One of the main reasons for the Alawites’ large representation in the military was the ‘divide and conquer’ strategy of the French colonisers at the beginning of the twentieth century who counted on recruiting minority groups. For the Alawites, this was a chance to escape their predominantly impoverished

situation (Joubin 2013: 26). Along with Syrians from rural backgrounds, Alawites joined the Ba’ath party in large numbers in the 1950s and 1960s because of its radical socioeconomic policies (Sluglett 2016: 41). Already before Hafiz al-Assad came to power, the Ba’ath party fostered a new political elite drawn from the country’s minority populations, especially from the Alawi sect, and from rural and lower- and middle-class backgrounds (Wedeen 1999: 8). Once Hafiz al-Assad, himself an Alawi, was in power in 1970, he promoted Alawi officers, employed predominantly Alawites in the coercive apparatuses and gave the whole Alawi community a reason to back his rule (Hokayem 2013: 31/32; Ismail 2011: 541). Zisser (1999: 135) describes the Alawites’ trajectory in Syria as a passage “from ethnic minority to ruling sect”. He defines the central elements in the process of Alawi mastery over Syria as: consolidation of the Alawite community within the army and the Ba’ath Party, hidden behind the leadership of Hafiz al-Assad; the transformation of the community into the main support of the regime; and the establishment of a covenant between the Alawites and other groups.

### ***Living with sectarianism in Syria***

Once, when we were sitting in a café belonging to an international chain, Majd, the student of economics with high career aspirations, explained the politics of Syria to me and repeatedly assured me that I could use his case and explanations in my research. Bitterly and with much agitation, he described sectarianism in Syria as a political strategy:

“The regime tried to play the sectarian game (*kān al-nizām yahāwal yal’ab ‘ala al-watar al-tā’ifī*). The regime played with that topic. Before in Syria, we didn’t have such a thing called sectarianism. My neighbours, for instance, were Christians and we were always visiting them and spent time with each other. The regime focused on this issue of sectarianism and started to tell the people: ‘If I leave as the regime, your sect will be erased. They will kill you!’ They started to force this idea into their brains (*bada’ yaghazīlhum min al-fikra*). Unfortunately, there are some classes (*tabaqāt*) that are very ignorant so the regime put weapons in front of them and told them: ‘Defend yourselves!’ At some point, the people started to be convinced that this idea is not right. Then, the regime started to request support from foreign powers. However, it will not be able to oppress the people. We are the whole people (*nahna sh‘ab kāmil*). We took up arms to defend ourselves. Even after many years the regime won’t be able to oppress us!”.

According to Majd's narrative, sectarianism was a strategy used by the Assad regime to arouse fear of other religious communities within Syrian society, which some parts of the Syrian society were unintelligent enough to believe. In a similar vein, political scientist Salwa Ismail (2011: 540) recognised that the dominant motives among Syrians she interviewed immediately prior to the beginning of the uprising in 2011 were fear of the regime's instrumentalisation of sectarian affiliation and a potential breakdown of society. Similarly, Joubin (2013: 25) stresses that the Syrian regime managed to cultivate a culture of fear in society by presenting itself as the last bastion of secular Arab nationalism and as the sole protector against imperialist threats and religious fundamentalism.

Like Majd, Maḥmūd initially emphasised in one of our conversations the absence of differentiation or discrimination based on sectarian affiliation before the uprising. However, he eventually corrected himself throughout our discussion with growing anger and emotion in his voice: "Actually, we had a problem. Now that I am here in Egypt I realise it. There was an Alawi dialect. It was strong and if it was spoken it meant: be careful. It wasn't the language of a partner, who lived in the same country". Maḥmūd describes the power of one sect in Syria and its dialect as the marker of this power. He illustrated his argument by depicting the situation of a taxi driver, who brings his client to the desired address and asks for more money than was initially agreed. When the client starts to use the Alawi dialect and refuses to give him the extra money, the taxi driver leaves, intimidated by his assumption that his client is an influential, powerful person. Another time, Maḥmūd said to me when we talked about the Syrian society:

"No one trusts an Alawi in the family, even if the Alawi is part of the family for a while. We never talk in front of an Alawi. We share information and criticism only with Christians or Druze. If you hear someone talking Alawi dialect, it means that someone threatens another person. If he wants to get privileges, then he will use Alawi dialect. People start to use Alawi dialect if they need it. [...] When they speak Alawi dialect, people get afraid".

Michael Kerr (2015: 3) contends that being Alawi was primarily a "communal and cultural symbol" and calls contemporary Alawi identity "a function of the contested nature of Syria's deeply divided society". The Alawi dialect is described here as an instrument of action and power, a symbolic capital, which is bound to the speaker's position in the social structure (Bourdieu 1977: 646). Through language, the speaker does not only aim to be understood, but also wants "to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (*ibid.*: 648). This means that the speaker is in a position of authority and

can control how the language is received. Bourdieu (*ibid.*: 654) maintains that the whole social person is speaking and that “the materiality conditions of existence determine discourse through the linguistic production relation which they make possible and which they structure”.

It can be argued that the use of the Alawi dialect, in the way Mahmūd experienced it, is a conscious move to communicate the Alawi sect’s dominance that is accepted through enforcement on the receiver, the other ethnicities in Syria. Mahmūd’s narratives furthermore suggest that living with a dominating, powerful faith group means constant suspicion, fear of exploitation and an inability to confront inequalities and privileging. I contend, analysing masculinity from an intersectional perspective, that the dominance of one sect and its expression through a feared dialect influences the life of the ‘other’ Syrian men: They are constantly reminded of the unequal power structures that have to be endured, they need to be continually alert as to who is listening to their words and are always aware of their inferiority, so vividly described by Mahmūd.

While Majd spoke of the Syrian people as a unified corpus standing up against the regime, Mahmūd distinguished between Alawites and the rest of Syria. Bashār described similar experiences with the Alawi sect, albeit more controlled and with less emotion in his voice than Mahmūd:

“If you enter to any governmental place you feel that it represents one sect only [the Alawites] and sometimes it makes you think that it represents only one village. You feel the injustice when they all speak in the same accent. You can feel the injustice in the country. That was a big mistake”.

Bashār refers to the Alawites and their dominance in governmental positions, and alludes to their origin from a similar region. When Bashār depicts the injustice in the country with anyone but the Alawites on the receiving end, Bourdieu’s (1977: 652) notion of the power of language is useful again. He stresses that language is worth what the speakers are worth, which relates to the economic and cultural power relations of the holders. He contends that when one language dominates the market, it becomes the norm against which the prices of the other modes of expression are valued. Even though the Alawi dialect, as described by my interlocutors, does not dominate the Syrian ‘linguistic market’ but is only spoken by a minority, it nevertheless has the authority and power to enforce action. The dialect is thus described as manifesting the day-to-day sectarian injustice in Syria.

Throughout our conversation, Bashār continued to emphasise the privileged

position of the Alawites in the country:

“They [the Alawites] held the highest positions in the army and in the police. The minority governs, especially the Alawites, because they rule without considering all the other minorities. So, the Syrian people is made of two types: Syrians and Alawites. Do you watch Faisal al-Qassem<sup>7</sup>? This person says: there are Syrians and there are Alawites, but he is dealing with them from a political perspective, not from a religious point of view. This fighting now is after more than twenty years of such politics. This is what they call now a sectarian war, but actually it isn’t a sectarian war because we never cared about which religion you have or which sect you are from”.

Like Majd, Bashār suggests that the conflict became sectarianised and opposes the idea that sectarianism was an inherent feature of Syrian society.

Conversations I had with Syrian men in Egypt that had a totally different focus were often permeated by references to the privileged position of Alawites in the Syrian society. When talking about their generation and the dreams they had for their life back in Syria, ‘Abd al-Rahman and Māzin stated that Alawites were, in contrast to them, advantaged and benefited through their affiliation with the regime. According to ‘Abd al-Rahman, students belonging to the Alawi sect attended better schools, received better education, and had a better standard of living. He further described that, when he was young, his parents forbade him to speak about the inequalities existing between the Alawites and the rest of Syrians, since the regime was supported by a huge security apparatus that controlled what was said about the regime’s sectarian basis. The all-pervading power of the Syrian secret service, and how it impacted on Syrian men’s lives in Syria and migrated with them to Egypt, is the topic of the next chapter. As with sectarianism, fear of the security service migrated with Syrian men to Egypt and impacted on their lives there.

Māzin, who studied dentistry at private universities in Syria and Egypt, after he had found an Egyptian sponsor, mentioned that, compared to the Alawites, he did not have many job opportunities back in Syria. Likewise, Hokayem (2013: 32) contends that the Alawi community did have better access to jobs in the security sector and that the overall conditions of the community improved over time. Creating dependence on the regime and alienation from mainstream society, the regime was interested in keeping the

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<sup>7</sup> Faisal al-Qassem is a Syrian Aljazeera host. He is the moderator of the weekly show ‘The opposite direction’, in which two guests discuss key debates of the Arab world (Lynch 2006).

Alawi community under its control, ready to be mobilised if needed (*ibid.*: 33). In contrast, several scholars express doubts about the Alawites' overall advantageous situation and argue that it is over simplistic to assume that the entire Alawi community was in a privileged position (Harling and Birke 2013; Ismail 2009; Salamandra 2013). Instead, it can be argued that the Assad family established itself at the expense of Alawi elites (Harling and Birke 2013).

Based on the judgements of several Syrian men, the Alawi community in Syria was privileged and in an overall powerful situation. This was expressed by Māzin when he mocked the Alawites' rural background and how their life had changed from a "life with cows, sheep, animals and houses made of clay to palaces in Damascus and Europe" (Māzin, June 2015). This echoes Rabo's (2005: 116) finding that it was common in Syria's larger cities to associate tribal and rural structures with the Alawi faith group, members of the Ba'ath party, the armed forces, and people working for the security service. Her observation thus shows that there was no clear-cut differentiation in the public perception between the sect and the political entities. Furthermore, Māzin's mockery could be understood as a way of challenging the Alawites' dominance in society – at least indirectly in the absence of any Alawites and in front of an outsider like myself. This assumption is based on Wedeen's (1999: 130) observation that through the use of rhetorical practices, such as jokes, people offer alternative visions of politics, challenge the official regime rhetoric, and show their awareness of the political system they live in.

Even though sectarianism was described without an explicit reference to masculinity, I argue that the structures described influenced Syrian men, depending on their social standing, in their self-perception. Given the Alawites' powerful positions in society because of their connections to the regime, their dominance in the army, security service and economy, I suggest that men belonging to other religious groups felt positioned at the lower end of the hierarchy when being confronted with the Alawi accent, as described earlier by Mahmūd. This must have evoked a feeling of being less worthy, less acknowledged and less privileged. Sectarianism and one's individual positioning in the sectarian context are thus part of how Syrian men feel as men. I suggest that Monterescu's conception of masculinity in a heterogeneous place with its focus on fluidity, hybridity and dynamism, is useful in providing an answer to the question of how masculinities in sectarian communities are constructed: Masculine performance in a heterogeneous place, where various power structures are in place, is dependent on the different daily encounters and enforces manoeuvring the continuum of acceptable versions of masculinities in a given context. This might mean compliance vis-à-vis a

speaker of the Alawi dialect, while mocking and joking about the regime and the Alawites in their absence.

Moreover, the narratives show that among the Syrian men I met in Cairo, the term ‘sectarianism’ was used to refer to conflicts among Sunnis, Christians, Druze, Shia, etc. – and those were remembered as being absent before the uprising. When Syrian men spoke of the Alawi sect, they did not frame it as sectarianism but described it as an ongoing and omnipresent injustice. Hence, it can be argued that my participants defined the relation of Alawites with all the other Syrians not in sectarian terms, but instead in terms of a ruling sect and an oppressed people. I contend that sectarianism and the injustice on the part of the Alawites were thus perceived as two different themes: sectarianism and its absence before the uprising were related to my participants’ lives in a heterogeneous society, while the narratives around the conflict with the Alawites clearly related to state oppression and the unjust position of power held by some people in Syrian society.

### ***The migration of sectarianism to Egypt***

The issue of sectarianism had an influence on Syrian men’s everyday life in Egypt and on the future they envisioned for themselves and their home country. Akram, the primary school teacher, described the transformation of a Syrian’s identity since the outbreak of the uprising: “At the time of the Syrian revolution, people started to be killed for their ideas and the society became shaped as: this is a Sunni, this is an Alawi, this is a Shia”. Likewise, Abū Walīd, who shared with me his experiences of being actively involved in weapon transfer for the opposition during the uprising, illustrated the heightened focus on sectarian belonging, and spoke of his complete loss of trust in certain sects:

“For the person, no matter if he is educated or illiterate, it is now generally impossible to live with other minorities. I am not talking about Christians, but about Alawi and Shia. We are the ones who were massacred (*nahna yalli zabahnā*). The ones who massacred the country were Alawi and Shia. Their ideology is: ‘kill a Sunni and you will go to paradise!’ You are surprised to find him ready with his weapons after all these years. And you used to feel safe in his presence for all these years. Now, how will you ever be able to feel safe around him again? (*shlūn rah targ‘a ta’minīlu marra tānī?*) In Homs, the most famous video maker, the one who took videos for the revolution and sent them to the

channels, came from America. He was Christian. He left his studies and he came to Homs. They killed him in Homs. Who killed him? The Alawites. They didn't distinguish (*ma mayazū*) whether he was Christian or Sunni. With these people, there is no safety (*līhadha al-ashkhās ma baqa fī 'aman*). I am not talking from a sectarian perspective. I explain for you what happens if you meet anyone who lost someone, was imprisoned or came to grief, and you ask him: 'who do you hate?'. He will answer: Alawi and Shia, but he won't give you names. Bashār is an individual, but he doesn't make any decisions. The decisions are made for him in Iran by the Shia. This is the thing which happens in our country. There are many people who would oppose my opinion. They would consider my words sectarian. No, we don't want to cover the truth. Our killer is one side (*yalli qatalnā huwwa wāhid*). We caused the damage to us, but the Shia killed more. I don't know if you are informed, but the percentage of Alawi in Syria decreased. They killed people from all the different groups of the Syrian people. They killed Sunni, Christians, Armenians, they killed them all. In my opinion, the living together will not come back to Syria (*ma baqa yarg'a al-ta'ayash al-mushtarak*)".

Abū Walīd drew the picture of a community fractured by sectarianism and hate that will never be able to live together ever again. His bitterness, anger and insuppressible hatred of other sects are understandable if one considers Abū Walīd's situation in Syria: he and his family used to live in an area that was dominated by Shia inhabitants. With the outbreak of the uprising, his former contacts, acquaintances and neighbours turned into his enemies. Shia militias tried to kill his father, who was a Sunni *shaykh* and then they kidnapped Abū Walīd at a street checkpoint, when he was on his way home. His family had to pay a lot of money for the kidnappers to set him free.

In order to embed Abū Walīd's narrative (as well as Majd's and Bashār's statements with regards to a conflict that became sectarianised), it is useful to review sociologist Rogers Brubaker's (2002: 166) concept of ethnically framed conflict. He stresses that rather than thinking of an ethnic conflict, it is more fruitful to consider a conflict ethnicised. Ethnic groups are reified by "ethnopolitical entrepreneurs" (*ibid.*) in times of conflict to reach certain goals. The danger of reification of ethnic groups is, and here Brubaker refers to Bourdieu (1991: 220 in Brubaker 2002: 166), that this process only produces that which is designated by the users of such categories. Ethnicisation of a conflict should thus be understood as a process that takes place on the political, social, cultural and psychological levels through narrative encoding. It means that a conflict gets an ethnic component through "ethnicized ways of seeing (and ignoring), of construing

(and misconstruing), of inferring (and misinferring), of remembering (and forgetting)” (ibid.: 175). Following his argument, both Akram’s and Abū Walīd’s narratives suggest that in the Syrian conflict sectarianism became a tool. Their perceptions of the conflict thus stand in sharp contrast to any primordialist conception of sectarianism.

In addition, an argument by Arjun Appadurai (1998: 229) helps to frame Abū Walīd’s explanations. He brings ethnic violence in contact with the sentiment of uncertainty caused by various current developments, such as migration, or the meaning of identities. He argues that uncertainty relates among other things to the anxiety as to whether a person really is what they claim or appear to be. An answer to this kind of uncertainty can be, according to Appadurai (ibid.), violence in order to discover who is ‘them’ and consequently who is ‘us’. Accordingly, ethnic violence develops because of a sense of betrayal, treachery and deception, which is the result of no longer being able to identify social contacts. Social contacts have transformed into monsters wearing masks behind which they hide their assumed, true, horrible nature leading the individual to sense that they have felt false solidarity and were utterly betrayed (ibid. 238). And indeed, Abū Walīd is shocked and abhorred by the Shia and Alawites being ready to fight after he trusted them for so many years, and consequently concludes that life in a heterogeneous community is no longer possible. I contend that having been shaken in one’s core beliefs about one’s society and previous life, as expressed by Abū Walīd, leaves the individual feeling unable to make proper judgement, enforces insecurity and lack of self-confidence, and creates ultimate fear and suspicion with regards to one’s present and future.

The issue of sectarianism thus proves crucial for the discussion of Syrian manhood in Egypt, as it is a central social category, that has turned many Syrians into fearful, insecure, suspicious, human beings full of hate, whose former understanding of the order of the world is shaken if not completely lost.

### *The Syrian ‘non-community’ in Egypt*

I now turn to an analysis of the consistency, manifestation and every-day experience of community life in Egypt. The reason I began to focus on the issue of ‘community’ during my fieldwork was its absence among Syrians in Egypt. I sensed an extreme suspicion and scepticism in my acquaintances’ dealings with each other. Syrian contacts kept telling me to be careful and not to trust any Syrian. They assumed that people would lie to me and would try to make use of me. Jamāl, for instance, who used to work with an NGO offering

psycho-social support to refugees, warned me that Syrians take advantage of my impression that they were *ghalbānīn* (poor). They would trick me to believe that they were in trouble in order to make me do something for them. ‘Azza, the Egyptian head of an aid organisation for Syrian refugees, told me that the Syrians in Egypt could not be defined as a community at all. She observed, for instance, that her Syrian clients would not inform each other of a free food or diaper distribution out of the fear that there might not be enough to cover their own needs. Most of the Syrians I met told me that there was no contact with other Syrians in Cairo and that Syrians preferred to keep to themselves.

Scholars dealing with the impact of trauma on a community contend that the community’s social tissue is often dramatically damaged, causing loss of confidence in the self and in the surroundings. Social bonds tear apart and fault lines that ran silently through the community before the traumatic experience are forced open. Community members who are absent in times of crisis might be similarly traumatised (see Suárez-Orozco and Robben 2000; Erikson 1995). Hence, it comes as no surprise that several studies suggest that refugee groups are internally factionalised and segmented. Fractures often exist along the lines of differences in class, politic views or religion, which reflect a continuation of divisions in the home country (Gold 1992; Kelly 2003). According to Kelly (2003:45), researching refugees who fled to the UK from Bosnia because of the civil war, the war not only ruptured family and friendship networks but also made the building of a community in exile problematic, as many people found it difficult to trust after what they had experienced. The literature on trauma and the consequent difficulty of building a community frames the extent of damage the Syrian society experienced and the severe influence the civil war and sectarianism continue to have on Syrians who fled the conflict.

According to Qutayba, the conflict and its heightened focus on sectarianism and political affiliation were transferred to Egypt and had a direct influence on the everyday life of Syrians there. He recounted that the relationships among Syrians when they first arrived in Egypt were shaped by the overriding question of who was pro and who was against Bashār al-Assad. Qutayba remembered that the situation was explosive and that many Syrians refused to work together in case they had different political opinions. He described that political discussions were not rational between people who had lost loved ones at the hands of either the opposition or the regime forces. Moreover, he explained how he was rejected by other Syrians when he first arrived in Egypt because his home city had only been recently under attack. He experienced that other Syrians in Egypt calculated whether to help each other and this calculation was based on whether they

came from the same region or city, and if not, whether the home city of the one in need was included in the revolution and to what extent it was destroyed. His account thus reinforces the importance of region in Syria and how it permeates various aspects of Syrian identity. Moreover, his narrative stands in sharp contrast to Ismail's (2011: 544) observation of the early days of the Syrian revolution, in which the residents of one town held protests in support and solidarity with people demonstrating in other regions of Syria showing their willingness to fight and sacrifice for each other. Qutayba's experiences in Cairo allude to the politicisation of one's origin, in which trust and support became linked to one's home city's involvement in the uprising.

Qutayba remembered another incident illustrating how political opinion permeated and defined encounters with other Syrians in Egypt: Once, he met a girl at a kiosk in the streets of Cairo. She spoke with a Syrian accent the Egyptian kiosk seller did not understand, so Qutayba translated her words into Egyptian Arabic. Afterwards, the girl and Qutayba had a quick chat. The girl said to him: "Please don't tell me that you are with Bashār al-Assad so I don't have to hate you!". Qutayba avoided meeting her again because he was disappointed by her judgement and general condemnation of anyone who did not share her political views. He was neither with nor against Bashār al-Assad and the revolution, he said, and wanted to be respected as such. Qutayba's illustrations imply that certain personal characteristics, such as one's origin and one's home city's performance during the uprising, have begun to outweigh one's self. He is directly judged based on his political opinions and reduced to them.

In a similar vein, Qays, the founder of an NGO planning activities for Syrians, drew a clear connection between the crisis and the communal life of Syrians in Egypt:

"The crisis is big. It caused a psychological problem. This problem made the Syrians decrease their circle of friends. At the beginning, I was careful to say or show my political or rebellious opinions, in order not to be hurt, and the fear reached high levels because of the injustice of the regime. The social relations are not good so at this point our team entered".

The goal of the NGO Qays founded was to improve the relations of Syrians in Egypt and to help "in rebuilding the Syrian society newly from scratch". For this reason, they were planning and organising communal events, such as an event for Syrian women on Mother's Day. Like Qutayba, Qays' narrative suggests that fear, self-control, uncertainty and suspicion define his everyday interactions and encounters. In order to describe the

lack of communal cohesion, Abū Walīd described his experiences of trying to establish joint projects in Egypt:

“We wanted to open a Syrian kitchen to help families. We were about twenty Syrians. There is such a kitchen in Istanbul. There are twenty or thirty families who help each other. Such a project doesn’t have any success in Egypt because you have two classes of Syrians and the two classes are very far away from each other. The ones who are down cannot help, if the ones who are up don’t do the same thing. [...] The Syrians are from many areas in Syria: Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and they don’t agree with each other. Maybe the women sit together in the morning and they greet each other, but regarding financial issues, they don’t agree. Maybe this is because we are outside of our homeland so everyone is afraid, but I don’t know the exact reason. As Syrians helping each other, we weren’t successful. Usually, Syrians are famous for making groups when they live outside of their homeland and they help each other, but here we are lost. On a level of twenty people, men and women, we couldn’t agree on a deal. We look like we are together, but actually we are not. When you create groups, there should be common things or affairs, but here it didn’t work out”.

Abū Walīd describes the lack of community cohesion as a personal failure and points to feelings of isolation and of being lost because a common ground and mutual understanding have vanished and fear and suspicion have prevailed.

In this context, it is worth noting that many Syrian contacts of mine complained about the inability to establish *jama‘iyyāt* (associations) in Egypt – a form of social commitment that was frequently used in Syria to organise financial savings. Dīma, a lawyer and student of mine, recalled that it was impossible to organise a group of Syrians with the aim of establishing *jama‘iyyāt*. Despite everyone’s initial motivation, at the end, no one would pay their share and the whole project would fail. Kastrinou (2016: 175) conceptualises *jama‘iyyāt* as informal groups that are neither registered nor affiliated with the state. These groups, which were pervasive in Syria, comprised of networks of friends, families, members of specific occupations, neighbours and sometimes cut across religious and ethnic divides (ibid. 2012: 66). Their members meet with the aim of collecting fees from each member that are paid to a different member of the group each time the group comes together. It is thus best described as a “rotating credit association” (ibid. 2016: 175). Kastrinou (ibid.: 180) argues that the establishment of *jama‘iyyāt* supports “Syrian inventiveness and efficiency in creating spaces that occupy the in-between space of state

and household” (*ibid.*: 180). The failing of *jama‘iyāt* in Egypt proves the lack of trust Syrians had in each other.

Furthermore, Dīma remembered bitterly a painful time in her life in Egypt when her husband was hit by a car on the streets of Cairo and broke both his legs. For three months, she took care of him at home and neither of them could work to provide for their two sons. She recalled how stressed her husband was, sitting at home unable to work as a dentist, and how she was worried and tense as well. They had to pay around 30,000 LE for his surgery and could only gather this amount of money through the help of relatives. Once, she posted a call for help on Facebook explaining the family’s devastating situation and their desperate need for expensive medication. She asked for help but never received any financial support. Later, she found out through her contact to a Syrian NGO that her Facebook post had been copied and shared by an acquaintance of hers with the added information that this person would collect money on behalf of Dīma. However, Dīma neither received any money nor did this person get in touch with her. Agitated, she explained to me that someone had obviously abused her vulnerable situation to receive donations and kept the money for themselves. She repeatedly mentioned during our various conversations that Syrians in Cairo would not help each other and would not care for each other. Dīma’s story thus describes the shock of not receiving help during one’s time of need but rather the abuse of one’s vulnerability.

It is an important finding for the forthcoming chapter that Syrians in Egypt described themselves and were perceived from the outside as lacking communal cohesion, showing no signs of support or care for each other. I suggest that not only the memories of injustice, the migrated emotions and present experiences with sectarianised conflict created this sense of a ‘non-community’, but also the fact that Syria’s regime heavily relied on its coercive security apparatus to guarantee its rule, which strongly influenced Syrians in Egypt. I contend that the experience of living in a ‘non-community’ evokes a deep sense of insecurity, fragility, incomprehension, sadness and fear. (Masculine) identity must be built anew and can only be formed on the unstable ground of living without visible communal structures. Mistrust and suspicion in others are the norm.

Having discussed the fractures, fissures and fragmentations among Syrians and the ongoing impact of sectarianism on Syrian men’s lives, I turn in the following paragraphs to a discussion of Syrian men’s encounters with the Egyptian host population

that were often defined in relation to the common historical period of the UAR and in relation to the Rabaa Square Massacre in 2013.

### ***Inventing ‘Syrianness’ through the United Arab Republic***

“Egypt was different for the Syrians at that time [in 2012]. The Syrians were more respected. They [the Egyptians] used to love them more and sympathised with them more. They always remembered the union between Egypt and Syria from 1956 to 1958 [sic]. So, there was respect at the beginning but when the Syrians became more the situation changed. There were some underlying tensions (*hasāsiyyāt*) between the people”.

As suggested by Māzin, one of the topics most often mentioned in my conversations with Syrians in Egypt dealt with their experiences with, perceptions of, and relations with the Egyptian host community. In order to frame their situation in Egypt, many referred to Syria and Egypt’s common history during the years of the UAR<sup>8</sup>. Based on their shared history, many of my interlocutors argued in a similar vein to Māzin that Syrians were initially welcomed in Egypt, that relations were “relaxed” as Hānī put it, and that there were “visas, projects and support” as described by Dāwūd. Moreover, Hānī understood the Union as a historical proof that Syrians and Egyptian could live together. He described how the UAR brought about close relationships.

“I wonder whether they [Syrians and Egyptians] will get used to each other. But in this situation, I say that the people lost everything so ... and we should remember that at the time of the Union between Syria and Egypt there were many marriages between Syrians and Egyptians. For example, I know a woman who is

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<sup>8</sup> Egypt and Syria, under Jamal ‘Abd al-Nasir and Sabri al-Asali proclaimed the Egyptian-Syrian United Arab Republic in February 1958. The unity was declared after Syria stood up and supported Egypt, which was attacked by France, England and Israel in the Suez Crisis. The UAR was perceived as the only option to counter Western hegemony over the Middle East. Elie Podeh (1999: 5-7) describes the widespread appeal of pan-Arabism, the charismatic nature of ‘Abd al-Nasir’s leadership and Syria’s and Egypt’s similar foreign policies as the main factors that encouraged and facilitated the existence of an Egyptian-Syrian union. However, several factors worked against the idea of a union, such as the physical absence of a mutual border, the different composition of the Egyptian and Syrian societies, differences in economies and politics that assured a difficult integration and a perceived superiority to the other existing in both countries (*ibid.*: 2-5). Syria held a subordinate role in the Union’s government with ‘Abd al-Nasir rejecting a joint leadership with the Syrian Ba’ath Party (Meininghaus 2016: 71). ‘Abd al-Nasir also made sure that Syria’s political parties were dissolved and that the Syrian army withdrew from political life (Jankowski 2002: 117). Shortly after its formation, the Union faced internal problems, induced by the introduction of a more centralised governmental structure, tighter controls of foreign trade, reforms of land and labour law. The Union eventually collapsed in September 1961 after a coup staged by Damascene Sunni officers (Joubin 2013: 62).

Syrian and she is married to an Egyptian for twenty years and they still live happily together. This woman is one of my relatives. He takes good care of her”.

According to his account, the UAR gives hope for a present and a future in Egypt, in which Syrians and Egyptians live together in acceptance and appreciation.

In an attempt to understand why many Syrians revived Syria’s and Egypt’s short common history, it is revealing to look at anthropologist Anita Fábos’ (2001: 91) work on Sudanese refugees in Egypt. She found that Sudanese put emphasis on cultural similarities shared with the Egyptians and on the official discourse held up by the Egyptians that Sudanese were their brothers in the Nile Valley. This happened despite that fact that the reality did not mirror this unity, since Sudanese could not get citizenship in Egypt and had lost many legal and political privileges. Due to the ambivalence between the official narrative and the political reality, Sudanese in Cairo began to focus on the cultural concept of ‘propriety’ that gave them the opportunity to highlight both unity with and difference from the Egyptian host society (*ibid.*: 92). While both mainstream Egyptians and Sudanese base their concepts of morality and propriety on the same pool of cultural knowledge, Sudanese transformed some of these common norms and practices into an ethnic vocabulary that distinguished them from the Egyptians. Fábos (*ibid.*) stresses that the difference with the Egyptian concept of morality was only articulated in the private sphere, while publicly the focus was on “meta-narratives of shared identity to include and be included by Egyptians”. I argue that Syrians in Egypt, similarly to Sudanese in Cairo, made use of the UAR to point out that Syria once stood on equal footing with Egypt as a political partner in crisis that was taken seriously. I suggest that the memory of the Union was used to emphasise this equality, to create respect, and to maintain this image of Syria before the Egyptians despite Syria’s current crisis.

Additionally, the memory of the UAR was related to a prospective return to Syria’s former position in the region. ‘Abd al-Rahman said:

“The Syrian people are generous. They hosted the Iraqis and the Lebanese people and didn’t make any tents for them. [...] I just wish that these countries [Iraq and Lebanon] remember the Syrians and the many nice things they did for them. We wish that Syria becomes a state again and we build it and we return to have strong relations with Egypt. We had strategic relations with Egypt. In 1958, there was a unity between Syria and Egypt. We wish for more care for the Syrians and that we return to build the economy and to have again treaties with Egypt or Jordan. We just wish”.

‘Abd al-Rahman’s narrative shows his longing for Syria to be a strong state again and thus reinforces the analysis to the relation of being a man with the state (which I mentioned in Chapter 2 and will discuss in-depth in the next chapter). As mentioned in the first chapter, the connection between masculinity and the nation state as an important aspect that requires analysis is reoccurring. It evokes the following questions: What is a man without a state? Can a nation state grant or guarantee masculinity? The need for making and analysing the connection between a strong state and the individual’s worth is furthered by Dāwūd: “Once I went back to Syria to see my family and frankly if I will go again, I won’t come back because in your own country you feel your value”.

Based on the literature briefly presented in the first chapter, which lays out the intimate relationship between men and the state, and the discussion in Chapter 2, I suggest that men, and ‘Abd al-Rahman’s account is indicative of it, suffer from the loss of contact to their nation state. They feel valueless and worthless. Moreover, Dāwūd’s and ‘Abd al-Rahman’s inability to currently rely on the nation echoes Nell Gabiam’s (2015: 488) observations among Palestinians in France with regards to statelessness. Her interviewees described statelessness as a feeling of non-existence, lack of recognition, as well as vulnerability to injustice and oppression. Statehood was instead related to a sense of belonging, control over one’s life, rootedness, and documents that guaranteed one’s mobility and origin. Consequently, I suggest that a strong state functions as a man’s backbone providing him with control and agency while a weak or an absent state relates to status loss, and lack of protection and social visibility.

The UAR is thus much more than a historical period that Syria and Egypt jointly experienced: it is a proof of Syria’s strength in the past, a claim for respect, a meta-narrative of shared identity that gives hope of being included and accepted by the Egyptians and an attempt to rebuild masculinity on a state that was once strong, able to give shelter to people in need, and respected in the Arab world.

### ***‘Othering’ processes after the Rabaa Square massacre***

The initial support sensed by Māzin and other Syrians when they first arrived, and which they explained through the common Syrian-Egyptian history, did not last because of the political incidents that occurred in Egypt in the summer of 2013. The ousting of former president Muhammad Morsi and the Rabaa Square massacre had a lasting effect on Syrians living in Egypt. Hostility towards Syrians was on the rise even before 2013, when

Morsi extended protection and public services for them in the previous summer. By presidential decree, Syrians were allowed to access public education and the healthcare system – privileges denied to other refugee groups in Egypt (Fritzsche 2013). A speech by Morsi in June 2013, in which he expressed his full support for the Free Syrian Army, ordered the closure of the Syrian embassy in Egypt and demanded the Egyptian people's participation in the fight against the Assad regime, further triggered anti-Syrian sentiments (Ayoub and Khallaf 2014: 20). After this speech, Syrians began to be accused of interfering in Egypt's politics by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood (*ibid.*). Hostility towards Syrians was exacerbated when Syrian refugees were publicly denounced for participating in the sit-ins on Rabaa Square organised by Morsi supporters after his ousting (Fritzsche 2013). The media fuelled the anti-Syrian sentiments with TV presenter Tawfiq Okasha warning Syrians to stop supporting the Muslim Brotherhood within the next forty-eight hours, if they did not want Egyptians to destroy their homes (HRW 2013). According to Fritzsche (2013), Syrians in Egypt were utilised to polarise the country and delegitimise the Muslim Brotherhood. While the Brotherhood was portrayed as a foreign-led entity, Syrian refugees were demonised and depicted as a threat to national security. Among my Egyptian acquaintances, there was a strong sense of rejection of Syrians' assumed participation in Egypt's national politics and a lot of anger that Syrians who were tolerated as foreigners and guests would interfere in Egypt's internal issues.

Mahmūd remembered that the summer of 2013 was defined by fear and insecurity. He avoided speaking Syrian dialect in public in order not to be identified as Syrian. He was called names and was treated badly by Egyptians. Mu'ayad, who had to flee to Egypt because of having been injured during the protests in Syria, remembered how he continuously reduced his presence on the streets of Cairo until he spent almost all his time at home unable to earn money and provide for himself. When I asked Rāfī, who regularly gave me a ride to 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, why he did not want to live there but instead chose another area of Cairo, where the Syrian presence was less visible, he answered that the Egyptians treated him better in areas with less Syrian presence. Rāfī clearly enjoyed spending time in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City. He said that the smell, the names, the shops and the chitchat on the streets reminded him of his life in Syria; however, he once experienced rejection there. When he entered a shop in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, the Egyptian vendor immediately insulted him, saying "*intū mish kwuayissīn* (you are not good people)". He assumed that the shop owner had had a bad experience with a Syrian and felt that all Syrians were the same. In order to avoid this sweeping rejection, Rāfī decided to live in an area of Cairo where fewer Syrians were living.

Bashār compared the Egyptians' hostile attitude after the Rabaa Square massacre with their perception of Syrians before Morsi's ousting in 2013: "When they heard the word 'Syrian', it was a very positive term and they used to say *ahlan wa sahlan* (welcome)". This stands in sharp contrast to the situation after the summer of 2013, in which, Bashār remembered, "if you say 'Syrian', you feel that it's nothing". Furthermore, he explained that the changing attitude towards Syrians was most obvious in the immigration department: "In the past, they dealt with me like a Syrian – a *dayf* (guest). Now, you have a window and it's written on it 'Syrian'. Next to it, there is a window for Palestinians and another window is for all the remaining Arab countries". Bashār describes how Syrians became a problematic case with regards to immigration to Egypt similar to the Palestinians, while before they were welcomed like other Arab countries before. Referring to the pro-Morsi demonstrations and the assumed Syrian presence there, Bashār proclaimed that Syrians in Egypt were accused of "things they didn't do".

Only a few Syrians I met, assumed that there was an actual presence of Syrians on Rabaa Square as had been propagated by the Egyptian media. If they believed that there had been Syrian participation in the demonstration, they either strongly condemned it arguing that these protesting Syrians did not know they had no right to interfere in domestic politics with their status as 'guests' in Egypt, or they assumed that these Syrians had been 'bought' by the Muslim Brotherhood. They related this assumption to the initial widespread support for Syrians by Egyptian aid organisations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and presumed that this drew Syrians into supporting the Muslim Brothers in demonstrations. Abū Māzin, for instance, told me that those Syrians who attended the Rabaa Square protests were extremely poor and were forced to participate by an Egyptian *shaykh* of a specific mosque in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, where he provided Syrian refugees with material support. In contrast, Fāris, the manager of a clothes shop, did not try to find excuses for the assumed presence of Syrians in the demonstrations, but described that the attitude of Egyptians towards Syrians understandably changed for the worse because of "bad Syrians" partaking in the pro-Morsi demonstrations. These Syrians, he stressed, did not understand their position as guests in a host country.

While Bashār used the term 'guest' as a status of respect, for Fāris, being a guest translates into the need for neutrality and staying out of the political issues of the host country. Being considered a guest and actively pursuing this role, can produce several additional consequences: In the context of Jordan, Salih (2013: 90) observes an arbitrary withdrawal of passports held by Palestinians. This practice is supposed to transform Palestinians in Jordan into docile subjects reinforcing the idea that Palestinians are

‘guests’ in Jordan rather than ‘citizens’. Likewise, in Lebanon, Palestinians are forcibly reduced to the status of ‘guests’ due to their national aspiration, which confronts them with expulsion, destruction, imprisonment and another statelessness (Salih 2014). Being a guest can thus easily transform into a silencing of the individual, enforcing complicity, docility, submissiveness and humiliation, and ultimately risks making the individual agentless.

I contend that among the Syrians I met in Egypt, being a guest translated into self-restraint and political apathy, which I not only found in the narratives just presented, but also in several other political debates, in which my Syrian acquaintances often preferred to remain silent. There was an awareness that activism and engagement in Egyptian domestic politics could endanger the collectivity of Syrians in Egypt and thus several Syrians, like Fāris, reiterated the discourse present in the Egyptian host population and induced by the Egyptian regime’s adoption of their portrayals of Syrians who participated in the events.

Another theme occurring in Fāris’s narrative is the refusal to identify those who presumably participated in the demonstrations in support of the Muslim Brotherhood as Syrians. There was an internal selection as to who was defined as Syrian, and those who presumably participated in the demonstrations on Rabaa Square were excluded because of their behaviour. Howell and Shryock (2011: 79) detect a similar redefinition of identity followed by a stigmatisation of those who do not fit in the context of Arabs in Detroit after 9/11. They argue that “to reassert their status as ‘good’ and ‘loyal’ and worthy of respect, Arab Americans must distance themselves not only from negative stereotypes, but also from the people who are most likely to suffer from these images and their consequences” (*ibid.*). This means for people who “belong to this zone of Otherness” (*ibid.*: 80) that they are silenced and better keep themselves to the background. The reiteration of the Egyptian discourse against the Syrians thus offered men like Fāris the opportunity to purify themselves through the creation of distance from the ‘bad’ Syrians, and to render themselves acceptable in the face of the regime and the biased Egyptians.

Consequently, the aftermath of Rabaa Square is not only an important signifier for Syrian-Egyptian relations, but also defines negotiations among Syrians. Syrians in Egypt had to make sense of being scapegoated by the Egyptians by creating a new ‘Other’ from their midst, against which they could construct a purer and ‘better’ version of themselves.

### ***Making sense of ‘self’ and ‘other’ through stereotypes***

In addition to blaming ‘bad Syrians’, several Syrians I met blamed the influence of the media and the Egyptians’ ignorance for the rise in xenophobia, intolerance, and suspicion against Syrians, as expressed by Abū Walīd:

“There are two Egyptian channels on TV and what they say in these channels is what the Egyptians believe. If the TV tells the Egyptians that we are terrorists, then we are terrorists. If we are *khuayissīn* [good in Egyptian dialect], then they believe that we are *khuayissīn*. Last year you put me on your head and now you believe that I am a terrorist? We started to see this in their eyes”.

Abū Walīd was not the only one who shared with me the belief that Egyptians lacked political acumen, which was obvious when they blindly followed the media’s definition of the Syrians as scapegoats. A similar sense of ascribed ignorance and lack of understanding is obvious in ‘Abd al-Rahman’s account:

“From 2006 until 2011, I was a *bāshā* (a respected man) in Egypt. Any Egyptian would call me *bāshā* and I was loved because there were not many Syrians in Egypt. However, when the incidents started in Syria they thought that we were fleeing from the war and that we needed them, but the money that any Syrian paid for the flight ticket for him and his family can provide living for one year for an Egyptian family. The costs of the trip from Syria to Cairo can cover the living for any Egyptian family. We see a lot of people living in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City in nice houses and they opened very fancy restaurants. We see how the Egyptians left the Egyptian restaurants and came to eat in the Syrian restaurants”.

The title *bāshā* had an important connotation in the pre-1952 monarchy in Egypt. The Palace bestowed this title on individuals (often large landowners) privileging them and giving them access to positions of power (Eid 2002: 194). It referred to influence, wealth, social status and authority (*ibid.*: 157). Nowadays, *bāshā* is used in everyday conversations in an informal manner. If used in an official environment, for example at the workplace or with high officials, it establishes and maintains relations of hierarchy (Shehata 2009: 227). According to Yūssif, an Egyptian student and acquaintance of mine, *bāshā* nowadays defines someone with money, property and influence, someone with high social status and a good life. Losing the status of *bāshā*, which ‘Abd al-Rahman, recognised, can thus be understood as a feeling of degradation in terms of class, status, respect and masculinity. While being Syrian used to be an influential, valued status, the

Syrian crisis and civil war diminished Syria's standing and consequently the position of a Syrian man in Egypt.

In addition to Egyptians' ignorance and lack of political knowledge, I heard several other stereotypes used by Syrians to describe themselves and stigmatise the Egyptian 'others'. This echoes Kusow's (2004: 179) argument that groups or individuals who experience stigmatisation by the society reverse the process and find their own ways to engage in stigmatisation of the dominant society. He found that Somali immigrants in Canada ascribe moral and cultural inferiority to Canadian society to draw a symbolic boundary, while they experience stigmatisation on the part of Canadian society because of their skin colour. Similarly, Peteet (2005: 184) argues that in times of conflict, moral distinctions were expressed. Palestinians found in the 'other' qualities they considered opposite to their own even while they could equally find similarities.

In order to further conceptualise the use of stereotypes that I observed among many Syrians, I turn to anthropologist Michael Jackson (2002: 75), who stresses the importance of the erection of boundaries in the context of displacement as a measure to safeguard one's sanity and integrity. He contends that a sense of control is recovered through the classification of the world in generalising, dichotomous entities, such as self and not-self, inside and outside (*ibid.*). For Homi Bhabha (1994: 94), the stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that constantly moves between what is already known, taken for granted and acknowledged as a fact, and what must be anxiously repeated. Speaking of its texture, he argues that the central element of the stereotype is its ambivalence, which gives it currency, weight, credibility and guarantees its successful propagation. Anthropologist Felix Girke (2014: 14) argues that stereotyping serves to project both fear and longing, nurturing both disdain and adoration. Stereotypes and images of the 'other' are always implicitly or explicitly comparative and show what is relevant about a given 'other' in a certain situation (*ibid.*: 15). Importantly for the following argument, he stresses that the self arises out of the fraught contact situation with the 'other' (*ibid.*: 21). Moreover, Girke defines the attempt to proclaim one's image of the 'other' as part of a system of domination and subordination (2014a: 147). Following these scholars, I analyse what the specific stereotypes in use reveal about fears and longing, situational relevance, how they were part of systems of power and group formation, and ultimately how they helped to define Syrian masculinity.

Layla spoke about her stay in Egypt by using several complementary stereotypes, such as poverty and wealth, submission and dignity, complicity and agency.

“We said revolution against the tyranny and against the ignorance and the poverty and everything, but when we came to Egypt we saw a new level of poverty. We were living like kings in Syria. We don't have this level of poverty and we didn't see it before and we didn't know it. I am not saying that there is no poverty in Syria but it wasn't like this, not like what they have here. She doesn't kiss your hand and foot for one pound. Our pride and dignity are above everything as Syrians, but they don't have dignity here”.

Layla clarifies her own middle-classness and the pride and dignity that middle-classness promises to women, by referring to the destitution she saw in Egypt that she considers incomparable to poverty in Syria. In order to further illustrate the level of poverty she found in Egypt, she referred to a ride in a minibus:

“They fight here for the minibus ticket. He said: ‘it is one pound and twenty-five piasters’, and the other one answered: ‘no, it is only one pound!’ and they stop the minibus and fight over twenty-five piasters. At the end, I told them: ‘I pay’. I wanted to understand what is going on in the minibus. I wanted to understand what the problem is and they told me that there were twenty-five piasters missing. I told the driver: ‘I pay you half a pound or one pound just so you keep driving. Isn't it a shame that you stop the traffic for twenty-five piasters?’ . And someone said: ‘now the Syrian will solve our problems’. They stopped the minibus and went out to fight over twenty-five piasters”.

Layla did not describe the life of the upper class in Egypt and similarly ignored that her perception of Syria did not represent the lifestyle and experience of Syrians from all social classes. She essentialises both Egypt and Syria and their respective populations – a core aspect of any form of stereotyping and othering. Through her use of stereotypes and comparison with the Egyptians, Layla, who faced a very difficult time in Egypt, manages to reintroduce the status she held in Syria.

In addition to frequent discussions of Syria's presumed wealth and Egypt's poverty, many Syrians I met displayed the exceptional work ethic of Syrian employees and entrepreneurs, and the high-quality products produced by Syrian factories and companies. I often heard that Syrian houses and restaurants were cleaner, that Syrian doctors were more educated and trustworthy, that Syria's streets were in a better shape, or that Syrian employers were preferred even by Egyptian workers. Qutayba, for instance, complained about the inadequate way his office was cleaned by the Egyptian staff. He said he usually had to tell the Egyptian cleaner to come back and redo their job three times

before his desk reached a satisfactory level of cleanliness. He added that he kept his own rag in his closet so that he could clean his desk and workplace if he remained unsatisfied. Qutayba believed it was Syrians' high standards, their level of expectations in themselves and in others, which differentiated them from the Egyptians. He was convinced that the Egyptians forgot the incidents that occurred in the summer of 2013 as soon as the Syrians had established themselves in Egypt, were in possession of many factories and shops, and were appreciated for their work and the quality they produced.

Mahmūd had set up his own office in his flat and had created his own material for tours he offered to tourists; he remembered a conversation with his Egyptian landlord, in which the landlord told him that Egyptians could learn how to be creative from the Syrians. He admired the fact that even though Syrians were facing a war in their home country, they could come up with original, innovative ideas in Egypt to make a living. In another conversation, Mahmūd spoke at great length about jealousy he saw in Egyptians, which was, in his eyes, an understandable outcome of their encounter with the more meticulous and diligent Syrians.

"and sometimes there is envy on the part of the Egyptians. Why? Because, as I noticed, many Egyptians told me: 'you are excellent in everything! You are the best in restaurants, you are the best in clothes. You open a dentist clinic here and you are the best. You open bla bla bla...!' I hear it from many people. I feel happy but at the same time I feel that the Egyptians who work in the same field are not happy because of the Syrians. And they are right sometimes. I am in my country and someone comes to my country and he starts to make any food and the people go to his place. Some Egyptians ate *hawāwshī* [an Egyptian meat dish] in a Syrian restaurant with me and they said that it was the best *hawāwshī* they ever had. *Bas hawāwshī ya 'nī masrī* (But *hawāwshī* is Egyptian)! Imagine if another restaurant here that is very famous hears that *hawāwshī* is the best at the Syrians! And the one who said it is Egyptian. They will say: Fuck Syrians!".

Mahmūd's talk of the danger of being too successful in the host country echoes the discussion of being a tolerated guest, who has to keep his head down and should not stand out in any way. At the same time, he reiterates the image of the ideal Syrian middle-class man who is characterised by creativity, ingenuity, diligence and productivity. Focusing on the food industry, in which many Syrians in Egypt managed to make a living, he continued:

“So, this is the difficulty: if you want to work you might face problems because you may not be good. However, Syrians have a different problem: they are famous for being good. And maybe they are not good. *Wallahi*, I met someone in Medan Lubnan and I asked him where he used to sell *shāwirmā* in Syria and I discovered that he was *hadād* (smith) back in Syria. He wasn’t doing anything with *shāwirmā* before. But he opened a *shāwirmā* shop in Egypt and wrote ‘Syrian Shawarma’ on the signboard and all the people trusted him immediately. I found the *shāwirmā* okay, not very special”.

There is a sense of reverse stigmatisation, as described by Kusow, in Mahmūd’s narratives as well as a reclamation of Syrian middle-class identity and masculinity coming into being through the comparison with the Egyptian others. Having been publicly scapegoated and blamed for interference in Egyptian politics and support of demonised Islamism, Syrian men and women engaged in stigmatisation of the Egyptian host population by creating their own definitions of successful identity.

### ***Masculinisation through stereotyping***

Not all stereotypes only implicitly referred to images of ideal masculinity, some prejudices explicitly expressed characteristics of ideal manhood with the purpose of distinguishing Syrian men from their Egyptian counterparts. Mahmūd told me that after the fourth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution there was a public outcry in Egypt following the killing of Shaimaa al-Sabbagh, that Egyptian men had no *rujūla* (masculinity). Shaimaa al-Sabbagh was killed by the Egyptian security forces on 24 January 2015 when she participated in a peaceful protest in Cairo to commemorate the revolution (HRW 2015a). Mahmūd told me that on the pictures and videos of her dying moments that went viral, he saw several men passing by without stopping to help the dying woman and the man who was holding her. To strengthen his argument, he added that Egyptian men on a bus would commonly not offer their seat to women and would rather watch them being harassed and stared at by other men. He said that in Syria, men always interfered if a woman was harassed, while in Egypt, men had not understood that *rujūla* was not only words but also actions.

Likewise, Mustafa, a student busy with his final exams, who participated in a variety of trainings and courses in his free time and came over as very self-confident,

made use of stereotypes that related to work ethic in addition to emphasising on Syrian men's appeal.

"Nowadays, I get accepted. The beginning was hard. You have to enforce that you get respected. At first, Egyptian men treated me badly, but when you enforce respect by showing that you are a respectable man, then everyone treats you well. At the beginning in Egypt you have to learn how to find your place. Egyptian men treat Syrian men badly because all the Egyptian girls are now attracted to Syrian boys more than to Egyptian boys. Also, Egyptian employers prefer Syrian workers because they work very hard and much better than the Egyptians. [...] The Egyptians are now used to us and they love to deal with Syrians".

As mentioned before, Mustafa describes women's preferences in and choices among men as having an impact on men's standing, in this case, a superior position vis-à-vis the less attractive Egyptians.

Like Mahmūd and Mustafa, Firās talked at length about the difference between Egyptians' and Syrians' approaches to work. When I met him, he was unemployed and was preparing to travel to Europe via the Mediterranean. He had initially tried to open a factory in Egypt but for many reasons could not do so. At the point of our meeting, he was unable to provide for his wife and two children. Nevertheless, he described extensively the success of his factory back in Syria, where they "worked with big contracts [and] used to work for France and Italy". He ascribed the failure of his project in Egypt to a lack of work ethic among Egyptian employees, who, in contrast to the Syrian workers, were in his opinion not "productive".

"The difference is that Syrians are very hard workers. They love to work. The Syrian likes to eat from the sweat of his forehead, while the Egyptian likes to abuse and likes to steal. This is the thing. There is a big difference between Syrians and Egyptians, isn't it? In their personality, there is a difference. They are cheating and they are not honest (*biyilifū wa yadawrū*). The Egyptians are very lazy people. He thinks about the day only. The worker in the factory takes the salary at the end of the month. The next day he doesn't come to work because he has money. He will come back when the money is gone".

Throughout the conversation Firās frequently described the Egyptians as "cheats" and bemoaned that everyone just wanted his money. He thus drew a clear picture of a certain type of man and his antagonist. There is the meticulous, diligent, enthusiastic Syrian worker, who appreciates the fruits of honest work and its opposite is the lazy cheat, the

liar, the thief, personified by the Egyptian. Knowing that he did not fit into this idealised picture of a Syrian man, being unemployed and preparing to leave for Europe in order to apply for asylum, Firās seemed to be even harsher in defending his perception of Syrian characteristics. I contend that his narrative defines Syrian masculinity in the first place by what it is not, namely cheating, lying or stealing. He uses the value of hard and honest work to degrade the Egyptians and give praise to the Syrians. The ‘lazy’ Egyptian embodied the opposite and abject notion of respectable Syrian masculinity and allowed him to reinstall a sense of success, dignity and manhood in a situation of displacement that disrupted his pre-flight goals and lifestyle. Here, stereotyping becomes a strategy to masculinise that is similar to the process described in Chapter 1, where the refugee in Europe is ‘othered’ and defined as undignified and less of a man.

### ***The victim aspect and compromises***

In addition to the glorification of Syria’s former wealth, the Syrians’ hard work and high qualifications and the consequent creation of ideal Syrianness and Syrian masculinity, another quite different narrative occurred in several conversations. It was the recognition of loss and the inability to maintain this value system. Abū Muḥammad said:

“We are making ourselves victims because sometimes we go to the Egyptians and we tell them: ‘please can you bring me this product?’. In this situation, we don’t ask for the price but we just give him what we have because we need it. Hence, we make ourselves and others victims because the Egyptians can dominate and control the price and the Egyptian also knows where to get the product from. Also for the Syrians when they bring something that the Egyptians don’t have they make the prices higher, for example, a product that costs 100 LE I can sell it for 120 LE because many people want it. Many Syrians do this because after three years of not working you can imagine everything. This is a small example but there are some people who sell something worth 1,000 LE for 2,000 LE. In this case, they are controlling each other and dominate each other. This creates hate but it’s inside. You hear them say that they love each other but inside of them, there is hate. This is the same among Syrians and Egyptians”.

There are many layers in Abū Muḥammad’s description: he acknowledges that Syrians in Egypt are often in a situation of need, in which they cannot bargain and negotiate on an equal footing but must accept the conditions set by the Egyptians. At the same time,

he recognises a change in the Syrians, who depart from the above described idealised notion of masculinity defined by honest and hard work, making business in a similar way to the Egyptians, fuelled by their role as “victims” who “can imagine everything”. Abū Muḥammad connects the transformation he perceives in fellow Syrians in contact with the consequences of Syria’s crisis and civil war. Their poverty demands new measures in order to survive. Hence, people adapt their ways of bargaining and of doing business. Likewise, Abū Walīd describes that many Syrians have ‘become Egyptianised’:

“I saw some who took over the personality of the Egyptians. They start to be dishonest (*biylifū wa yadawrū*) as well. It’s famous that the Egyptians abuse others so the Syrians take over these habits. Maybe some of the Syrians already had these habits in them in Syria, but in Egypt it shows. They begin to consider it *shatāra* (smartness)”.

Abū Walīd draws the picture of a community that is forced to adapt, assimilate and ‘become’ Egyptian. Living as displaced people in Egypt makes fellow Syrians show their true face and characteristics. Morals and values upheld in Syria are now exchanged for a better strategy of survival. Both narratives show that something has changed, that the new situation in Egypt makes it difficult to maintain certain ideas about life and images of ideal Syrian masculinity. Syrians are no longer in the position to make decisions solely based on their background and ideals, but the crisis enforces a re-evaluation of approaches to life. This echoes a study by Marlowe (2012) among Sudanese refugees living in resettlement in Australia, where men expressed that they had to ‘walk the line’ between connections with the past and what is considered normative within Australian society (ibid.: 57). This happened sometimes voluntarily and was sometimes enforced on them if they wanted to be successful in Australia (ibid.: 58). ‘Walking the line’ meant being able to compromise and to strategise in order to both recognise the present and hold onto the past (ibid.: 63).

According to Dāwūd, the transformation of many Syrians is not only due to their inherent, but hitherto, hidden characteristics and the consequences of displacement, but also to their treatment by the outside world:

“When the people see a Syrian family, they will only welcome it, if they have an interest of their own in them. Maybe they think that one of them can marry the daughter. Actually, all the relations became relations with interest. There is nothing human. This is the reality. [...] The Syrians always used to have dignity but now the majority of people who want to help you, want to take advantage of

you. However, we always expect the good intentions. This is how we grew up. You arrive and you want to help but inside you have bad intentions. We are not used to that”.

Dāwūd refers to a poisoning of Syrianness, which is characterised by a strong and naïve belief in the other one’s good intentions. Only when being confronted with the bad intentions of the outside world, did Syrians understand the cruelty of others and eventually adapted and transformed their otherwise ‘pure’ Syrianness. Forced displacement is described here as a force that has changed Syrians to the extent that they cannot uphold their ideals anymore and recognise how the others’ behaviour infiltrates Syrian values and morals.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has discussed sectarianism as a form of ‘baggage’ that migrated with Syrians to Egypt and impacted on their social relations and lives there. Furthermore, this chapter has shed light on the omnipresent emotions of anxiety, grief, anger, betrayal, isolation and hate related to having had to flee from a sectarianised civil war and to the horror, loss of context and reality, and inability to understand what Syrian society has become. The sectarian violence that has become part of the Syrian civil war made Syrian men feel that they learned the truth about fellow Syrians who used to be their neighbours, acquaintances and friends but ultimately betrayed them and showed their ‘true’ faces. Syrian men responded with a new awareness of who was ‘us’ and who was ‘them’ and reported to have become hostile, suspicious and hateful vis-à-vis other Syrians. Sectarianism as well as emotions, memories and experiences carried on from Syria could not but influence Syrian men’s encounter with other Syrians in Egypt and thus impacted on their experiences of community and social contact. During forced displacement, there was an absence of community cohesion and the form of living together in Egypt Syrian men described could only be conceptualised as a non-community.

From an intersectional perspective, sectarianism, and the sentiments that come with it, such as being less privileged, less worthy, less seen and treated unequally, can be described as markers that colour and inform Syrian male identity.

Moreover, this chapter has dealt with Syrians’ encounters with the Egyptian host society that were often narrated by referring to the UAR and the incidents on Rabaa Square. Both discourses do not only describe the contact of Egyptian and Syrians but also

illustrate processes of ascription and denial of an ideal version of Syrianness to other Syrians. The stereotypes that were used to describe Syrian superiority over Egyptianness speak to the image of the ideal Syrian middle-class man described in the previous chapters.

Having analysed notions of community, self and ‘other’ in this chapter, the focus of the next chapter is on Syrian men’s interactions with the state, their encounters with the Syrian security apparatus, and the omnipresence of fear that did not release its grip on them despite their geographical distance from Syria.

## **Chapter 6 – *Of Fear, Guilt and Mistrust***

### **or Masculinity, interaction with the state and the migration of fear**

In May 2015, I met Abū Muḥammad. He was the father of one of my students and of three more children, and had managed to open a little food shop in a busy middle-class neighbourhood in Cairo. When he found out that I was from Germany he approached me asking whether I could give him some information about life in Germany as he and his family had been chosen by the UNHCR to be resettled there, and he was eager to discuss what I knew about German lifestyle, culture, habits and traditions. Over the course of our meetings we not only talked about Germany but he also shared with me his opinions, experiences and beliefs about Syria.

One time we met in a café. Abū Muḥammad was about to travel to Germany with his family and suggested that I should meet his cousin Layla and her daughter who would remain in Cairo after his departure. He gave me strict instructions how to behave when visiting them knowing that his widowed cousin and her teenage daughter were in a precarious situation because Layla’s son had gone to Sweden and there was no man in the flat. Abū Muḥammad advised me to meet his cousin in her flat wearing appropriate and decent clothes in order to avoid any gossip from the neighbours. If I wanted to interview her or other Syrian contacts, he suggested that I recorded in secret, keeping the device hidden in my pocket. He also encouraged me to ask questions relating only to societal and economic issues and strongly recommended avoiding any kind of political questions, especially those referring to political affiliations and preferences. He said that the Syrians in Egypt were exhausted and anxious and they would assume that I was a spy if I did not follow his instructions. Abū Muḥammad further stressed that it was difficult for Syrians to assess me as a person, my intentions, and the reasons behind my research. The underlying assumption that I, as well as other foreigners, could be affiliated with the *mukhābarāt* or could work as a spy for the ‘West’ was, according to several scholars who conducted research in Syria, a widespread phenomenon (see for example van Eijk 2016: 13; Borneman 2009: 238). In order to clarify the relevance of his instructions, Abū Muḥammad mentioned an Egyptian American volunteer, who taught English in the same institution as me and had just posted pictures from a trip to Israel on Facebook. Abū Muḥammad announced that people, and especially our students, were “scared of both of [us].”

In this chapter, I aim to analyse the omnipresent fear that was behind Abū Muḥammad’s clear instructions. This fear, I argue, has its origin in Syrian people’s past encounters and experiences with the Syrian state. It did not stop at the borders of Syria but travelled with most people I spoke to in Egypt, where it turned into a pervasive anxiety and suspicion of the Syrian embassy, the Egyptian state and its authorities, as well as individuals believed to be allied with either the Egyptian or Syrian states. In this context, I highlight how Syrian men’s anxiety was most candid and obvious with regards to the services of the Syrian embassy. The Syrian embassy had the reputation of being an extension of the Syrian regime that had the potential to threaten, haunt or even kill Syrians living in exile, and thus indicates the migration of fear that many of my interlocutors felt.

Furthermore, I discuss in this chapter the relationship between Syrian men and the Syrian and Egyptian nation states. I follow James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002: 984) who argue in the context of their research how the state comes to be understood in local communities in India as an entity with particular spatial characteristics that “an analysis of the imaginary of the state must include not only explicit discursive representations of the state, but also implicit, unmarked, signifying practices”. I highlight how Syrian men in Egypt remembered their interactions with the state apparatus in Syria – especially in terms of bureaucratic procedures and the need to make use of bribes and *wasta* (connections) to manage them. *Wasta* is a concept defining a set of useful relationships needed in order to get anything from jobs, political favours, loans, documents or subsidies in Syria. In Schielke’s (2015: 155) words, *wasta* refers to “networks of nepotistic and clientelist dependence”. The ‘currency’ to pay for *wasta* is personal favours or bribes. Nevertheless, in order to be able to make use of *wasta*, ethnic and kinship ties as well as social status are needed, which means only well-off and well-connected people can benefit from it while minorities and marginalised groups are often subjected to patronage relationships and are dependent on people in positions of more power (Galie and Yıldız 2005: 34). Another aspect of this chapter is a discussion of what it means to leave behind a life under an authoritarian regime only to arrive in a country with comparable features, such as a corrupt bureaucratic system and a powerful security service. I discuss how Syrian men navigated their encounters with the Egyptian state and how the ‘taste of *wasta* and corruption’ stayed with many of my interviewees and affected their lives in Egypt.

Ultimately, this chapter identifies both the fear of state authorities and the problematic strategies Syrians had to adopt when approaching the Syrian state as aspects that affected Syrian men. Regarding the influence of fear on constructions of gender, I follow anthropologist Linda Green (1994: 230) who conducted research among women

in Guatemala and argued that “any understanding of the women’s lives would include a journey into the state of fear.” Getting used to a life in terror and crisis, which ultimately destroys the social fabric of society, “allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a face of normalcy” (*ibid.*: 231). In a similar vein, an understanding of Syrian men’s lives requires an analysis of the fear that defined various parts of their lives in both Syria and Egypt.

With its focus on state-induced fear, this chapter sheds light on how living under an authoritarian regime destabilises notions of manhood and threatens the contours of masculinity. Fear and discomfort accompanied the transition from citizen under an authoritarian regime to refugee in an authoritarian host state. Syrian men’s notion of fear was active, in motion, docking to new objects and persons in Egypt. The focus on uncomfortable practices, such as making use of *wasta* and bribes, shows that men both back in Syria and in Egypt were in the first place reactive and responsive to the authoritarian system and had to juggle their morals, values and beliefs with their economic survival.

### ***Corruption, bribery and *wasta* in Syria***

According to an earlier work by Akhil Gupta (1995: 388/389) on the theme of corruption and the state in the everyday conversations of villagers in Northern India, corruption is by definition a violation of norms and standards of conduct and thus the opposite of accountability. The discourse of corruption, he argues, is central to understanding the state-citizen-relationship because it both enables people to construct the state symbolically and to define themselves as citizens. There are varying opinions as to how corruption should be assessed, where it is a phenomenon that ‘humanises’ the state or whether it leads to an unjust distribution of resources. I follow the approaches put forward by Tone Sissener (2001), Jonathan Parry (2000) and David Sneath (2006) – all of them engaged in analyses of forms of and discourses around corruption – who argue that corruption does not exist in a vacuum, that we need a personalised and situational perception of corruption listening to our interlocutors when defining what is considered legal and where corruption begins, and that we need to include an analysis of the boundaries of the state.

Under the rule of Hafiz al-Assad, the number of state employees in Syria increased dramatically between the 1970s and the 1990s. The expansion of bureaucratic procedures

facilitated access to the state, while, at the same time, the regime made its presence visible all over Syria. Perthes (1995: 142) argues that public employment was a means of political and social control. Through voting cards, identity cards, passports, and various permits required by citizens wanting to travel, build, marry or work, people were bound to the state's bureaucratic apparatus (Rabo 2014a: 220) and corruption was widespread within this apparatus. Consequently, there was a need for the people to keep in with authorities and civil servants. Connection to state employees was often essential to gain what one was legally entitled to (Perthes 1995: 142). Rabo (2005: 150) emphasises that most of her informants, Aleppian traders and merchants, were acutely aware of the ubiquity of bribes and corruption, which was perceived as a structural disease. She further describes how they faced uncertainty and inconvenience in their daily dealings with representatives of the public sector (Rabo 2014a: 219). The possibility of bribery existed because citizens had to approach the Syrian authorities in person and because they were tied to the public sector in various ways (*ibid.*: 220). Aleppian traders usually attributed everyday petty corruption and bribes to the low salaries of state employees. Even though in principle bribes were rejected as immoral and shame was expressed about their existence in Syria, Aleppian traders often argued that they had no choice because state employees would not grant them their rights without receiving a bribe (*ibid.*: 219).

In order to give a contextual and theoretical framework to the discussion of *wasta*, bribery (*rashwa*) and corruption (*fasād*), I begin by introducing two ethnographies and a political analysis of Syria and compare them with Hannah Arendt's analysis of administrative strategies of British imperialism. A recurring theme in both Annika Rabo's (2005) and Paul Anderson's (2013) ethnographies focusing on Aleppo's merchants and traders is the misery of being part of a political and economic system one despises for its unjust practices. People interviewed by Rabo and Anderson were aware of their complicity with, and engagement in, a system of which they were critical. Anderson's informants condemned their involvement, which to them represented inevitable moral degradation and gave them a sense of self-contempt. Their dissatisfaction echoes political scientist Lisa Wedeen's (1999) analysis of the politics of 'as if' prevalent in Syria under the rule of Hafiz al-Assad. Syria's cult of the leader – the omnipresent pictures, the rhetoric of praising his rule and the frequent public acclamations – served as a way of disciplining and controlling citizens and created an atmosphere of public dissimulation, in which Syrians had to act 'as if' they admired and respected their president. People had to show their obedience by performing and pronouncing their support, whether they believed in it or not. The state's power was painfully visible for the very reason that it

could make its citizens act against their opinions ‘as if’ they truly believed in their own actions and approval of the regime. Furthermore, the regime carried out actual punishment of those who disobeyed, but also and primarily relied on the citizens’ anticipation of punishment (*ibid.*: 146). According to Wedeen (*ibid.*: 6), the politics of ‘as if’ proved effective because it produced guidelines for acceptable speech and behaviour and induced complicity by creating practices in which citizens became ‘accomplices’. The division between ruler and ruled was blurred, she maintains, because people were in their way both victims and supporters of the system (*ibid.*: 81). The cult around Hafiz al-Assad and his regime not only enforced active and passive compliance (*ibid.*: 147), but also isolated citizens from one another. While Wedeen’s analysis focuses specifically on the strategy applied by the Syrian regime to control its people, her concentration is less on the question of how the ruling strategy of forcing the citizens to act ‘as if’ they truly supported their president impacts on the self-perception and negotiations of identity of the Syrian people.

This gap in Wedeen’s work can be filled by Anderson’s research. His focus is on the question of how living under an unjust regime impacts on the individual. He detects a notion of scorn among Aleppian merchants, who are acutely aware of their incapacity to distance themselves from a political system they oppose (2013: 468/469). He identifies these narratives of scorn as a form of political agency. He argues that narratives of involvement that identify the self as an object of scorn make sense in a political climate, in which it is dangerous to identify power holders and in which a clear-cut distinction between the oppressors and the oppressed cannot always be drawn. Since relations with the local regime and bureaucratic officials were an essential part of everyday life in order to secure one’s social and economic survival, the practices and ideas of power and resistance became blurred and diffused (*ibid.*: 469). Like Anderson, who maintains that the subject is not simply oppressed by the circumstances, but is actually tainted, transformed and influenced by them, Rabo (2014) argues that the prevalence of bribery was ubiquitous and much discussed among traders and manufacturers in Aleppo. However, in contrast to Anderson, she observed that the traders’ participation in the system of corruption was excused as an inevitable need for survival. While it was important for a trader’s reputation not to be too intimately connected to the state, there was a general acknowledgement that a trader could not survive without paying the bribes.

Regarding the meaning of corruption and oppression, Hannah Arendt (1973: 212) argued in her pioneering work on totalitarianism that, in contrast to the strategy of “aloofness” used by all members of the British services in the colonies, in which all

contact between the despot and his subjects is lost, corruption, exploitation and oppression seem to be “safeguards of human dignity” because the connection between oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited and corrupter and corruption is not totally cut. Rather, ruler and ruled are fighting for the same goals, live in the same world and aim for the possession of the same things. It could thus be added to the picture drawn by Anderson and Rabo that contact with the ruling regime, even though it is defined by corruption and bribery, still guarantees a minimum of human dignity to the people forced to comply with such actions.

Several times during discussions with Syrians I met in Egypt, we came to talk about the payment of bribes, the need to make use of *wasta* and the existence of corruption back in Syria. Once, I followed a heated debate about politics and corruption between Maḥmūd, Yāsmīn and Firās.

- Firās: Life in Syria was wonderful. We lived happily. The poor and the rich were able to live. The people were together and they lived in peace. We didn't have a problem with sectarianism. Our neighbours were Shiites and Alawites and we were living and we all loved the president...
- Yāsmīn: I feel that the interview takes place in Syria and not here!
- Firās: ... We didn't talk about politics because we were living our lives. We were happy. No one cared about politics. No one thought about it. We lived, we were happy and there was money.
- Yāsmīn: Were you happy with the regime and the police?
- Firās: There were mistakes but we were used to it and we were happy. *Al-fasād kān fī damma!* (Corruption was in our blood!). Whenever you [he points at Maḥmūd] enter a public office the first thing you do is to try to put 500 SL on the employee's desk. It is your nature. It is our nature.
- Yāsmīn: The poverty led to corruption.
- Firās: No, the poor and the rich were living (*kunna 'ayshīn*).
- Yāsmīn: Give the message in a correct way! What do you mean with living ('ayshīn)? The poor were living eating falafel and the rich were living eating kebab. You should make this message clear.
- [...]
- Yāsmīn: The corruption was spread all over Syria because of the poverty. The dictatorial regime ruled with an ‘iron hand’ [*quwa wa ḥadīd*]. Any policeman or soldier can control the Syrian. The corruption comes from up, not from down. The soldier takes money in order to feed his children because the salary is low. The

regime follows the strategy of making people hungry. The regime just gave you a little bit so that you can only think about how to feed your children and not about politics. [...] There were people who lived in rubbish to find food and there were people who lived in palaces. You can find men who die of a heart attack when they are forty years old because they cannot feed their children. [...] Corruption comes from the poverty. It doesn't come by itself. The state employees take money because of the poverty and so do the police. Even the ordinary citizen gives bribes because he has been corrupted. Why? Because he needs his documents and the salaries are not high enough in order to make us not think about politics. We were living like wild animals! (*'ayshīn nahna mitl al-bahāyim!'*).

In this dialogue, several important issues are addressed that are relevant for this chapter: Firās is teased for talking as if the interview took place in Syria implying that there is a certain way of speaking inside and outside of Syria; there is a sharp class distinctions and difference in experiences and opinions based on one's class background; there was an absence of political debate back in Syria; there was extreme poverty among the people and indifference by the regime and how the poverty impacts on the people, so that men die because they fail as protectors and providers of the family.

With regards to corruption, Yāsmīn's points of view can be framed when bringing them in connection with Rabo's ethnographies as they mostly affirm her observations. The explanation Yāsmīn gave for the existence of corruption closely resembles the justification Rabo (2014a: 219) regularly heard while conducting research in Syria, which is that bribery and corruption persisted because of general poverty and the low salaries of Syrian public employees. Furthermore, Yāsmīn excuses 'ordinary citizens'" engagement in corruption. They have been left with no other choice, she argues, because without the use of bribes they would not receive their legal entitlements. Corruption is perceived as a tool in the hands of the regime, thus coming 'from above' rather than being an inherent characteristic of the Syrian's nature, as Firās described it. Hence, Yāsmīn echoes another of Rabo's (*ibid.*) observations, which is that her interlocutors excused their own use of bribes using the argument that the state would not grant its citizens rights without a bribe. However, Yāsmīn goes even further when she bitterly assumes that the existing poverty and consequent corruption is a conscious strategy of the regime to keep citizens under control and too busy to develop an interest in politics. Similarly, Rabo (*ibid.*: 213) heard from her informants that daily life in Syria was hard and challenging in order to keep people distracted and too busy to be politically active. Furthermore, Yāsmīn shows her disappointment in the living conditions she had to accept in Syria, comparing it to the life

of ‘animals’. Based on the persistence of corruption, bribery and poverty she ascribes to the Syrian people a degraded and inhuman status, which makes men die at a young age because of their inability to feed their children. In contrast, Firās perceives corruption as a natural trait of the Syrian people and as a useful technique and strategy to ease one’s life. Both Yāsmīn and Firās explain the contradictions of being part of a corrupt system and negotiate in albeit different ways the paradoxes they used to live every day. Their dialogue shows forms of denial, downplaying and naturalisation of corruption in Syria.

While Yāsmīn tried to explain the existence of corruption and bribery in Syria and Firās defined paying bribes as a ‘natural’ and an entirely acceptable and useful habit, Abū Muḥammad shared with me in one of our long conversations that he was against bribery, even though he was clearly aware of its existence and power in Syria:

“In Syria, life was beautiful and things were going well. Regarding our jobs, we faced limitations. You could get a governmental job through *wasta*, nepotism (*mahsubiyya*) and bribes (*rashwa*). We didn’t object it. If there was a problem at the border at the customs office we were only able to resolve it with money. Money had the power to resolve problems and also nepotism was really important. So, life in Syria was nice, the only problem was the existing injustice and domination”.

Throughout the conversation, he repeatedly mentioned that he felt helpless and unable to escape the corrupt system. “They ask for impossible things and you won’t be able to do them”, he explained referring to state officials who could stop anyone randomly at the border or in the streets and arbitrarily create a problem, and “then you have to pay a bribe”. According to Abū Muḥammad, the status quo in Syria was comparable to enforced adaptation:

“It was impossible to object. When the price of bread increased, we didn’t say anything. We didn’t have any objection. I simply started to buy less quantity of bread. There was nothing called objection, but you had to manage yourself (*zabat ruhak*). [...] The government didn’t feel the suffering of the people. You should pay for anything. You had to pay for anything you wanted no matter if it was your right to possess it or not”.

His descriptions illustrate an arbitrary, inescapable control that every citizen encountered and the citizens’ adaptation – through bribes or through changes in their lifestyle – as the only coping mechanism available. Even though opposition and objection are perceived as a reasonable reaction to the experienced injustice, it simply did not happen. Instead,

money became the tool to achieve one's needs. Through the right amount of money, one could get any item that one wanted.

Because Abū Muḥammad was against paying bribes and tried to circumvent it whenever possible, he employed a middleman if he needed something, such as documents or other state services, that could require the payment of bribes.

"I didn't like paying bribes. What did I do? I phoned someone who we call *mu'aqqib al-mu'amalāt* (middleman). I paid him and I didn't care if he paid bribes or not. I just gave him the money he requested because I didn't like to deal with this. [...] I said: 'I don't have any relations with bribes, you do everything.' We can consider him an ordinary person, who has relations with the employees. He is not a lawyer. If he pays bribes or not it's not my problem. Generally, the problem of bribes is big".

He distanced himself from paying bribes whenever possible. However, this did not mean that he subverted the system, but rather, that he found a way to reconcile his morals with necessary survival under a corrupt regime. He knew that he was part of the unjust system that he rejected. This echoes an argument that anthropologist Veena Das (2015: 323) puts forward in her analysis of corruption in ordinary, everyday practices. She claims the banalisation and condemnation of corruption often go hand in hand and that a double valence is created in order to be able to acknowledge both the immorality of corruption and the personal involvement in it. In accordance with Das's insight, Abū Muḥammad is both vocal about the bad impact of corruption on his life, but simultaneously describes his own way to navigate a corrupt system.

In a long conversation with Mu'ayad, he explained to me that a person in an influential position (*mas'ūl*) could be described as a *qafīl* (lock). If one needed something from the *mas'ūl*, the first step one had to do was to find the *muftāh* (key). The key was a person whom the *mas'ūl* trusted and who took over the position of the mediator. As a mediator, the *muftāh* could tell the one in need of a favour from the *mas'ūl* what kind of bribes were accepted. Bribes could be anything from personal favours to money or jewellery for the *mas'ūl*'s wife. Mu'ayad's account echoes an argument Gupta (1995: 380) put forward in his analysis of the discourse of corruption in rural India, namely that bribery was not simply an economic transaction but a cultural practice that required a high level of performative competence. Furthermore, Mu'ayad told me that, in his opinion, it was the desperate situation in Syria that made people accomplices of the system and made them accept corruption and bribery. He explained to me the following:

if one's family was in danger and one knew that the only way to protect them was through bribes, anyone would engage in bribery even if one had said in times of peace that one would not get involved in such practices. He implies that people had to navigate their beliefs and that with more pressure applied, the less focus could be given to one's morals, values and convictions.

His words resonate with a statement by anthropologist Michael Jackson (2002: 122) in the context of his dealing with storytelling among "people in crisis". He argues:

"As with people in crisis anywhere, life is ad hoc, addressed anew each day, pieced together painfully, with few consoling illusions. To get through the day, or through the night until morning, little or no thought is given to what is true, meaningful, or correct in any logical or ideological sense; one's focus is on what works, on what is of use, on what helps to survive".

The severity of a situation enforces the use of certain measures that one would avoid in less stressful and dangerous times. This is also obvious in the way Fādī put his father's use of *wasta* after he took part in a demonstration in 2011.

"[...] My best friend talked to him [an acquaintance of Fādī] and convinced him not to tell his father that he had seen me in the demonstration. But then, a member of the secret service called my father to tell him that he wanted to interrogate him and me. My father needed to make use of his connections to solve the problem".

In both Mu'ayad and Fādī's accounts it is the family's well-being that is under threat and in order to protect it, the use of 'immoral' measures is required. As far as the construction of gendered, and especially masculine, identity under such circumstances is concerned, I argue that the omnipresence of bribery, *wasta* and corruption urged each individual to make sense of their actions. Whether one accepted bribery and corruption as part of the system and used them as a tool to extend one's power, like Firās, or whether one tried to reconcile the necessary payment of bribes with one's morals, like Abū Muhammad accepting that payment guaranteed survival – a negotiation of one's stance towards bribery, corruption and *wasta* was necessary and inevitable, and affected one's self-perception in one way or another. I suggest that this process of making sense could prove in a painful way one's inability to live up to personal standards and values showing with clarity that one yields to the pressure and caves in.

A revealing example to prove this point is given by Arendt (1973:431/432), when she depicted humiliation on the part of the employee who got a job because of the unjust removal of his predecessor. The jobholder in this situation becomes a conscious

accomplice in and beneficiary of the crimes of the government. She contended that becoming a beneficiary of the regime, whether one likes it or not, may not only lead to feelings of shame and disgrace but also to a more passionate defence of the regime. Adapting her analysis to the situation many Syrians faced in their interactions with the Syrian state, I suggest that the daily need to make use of *wasta*, bribes and corruption created among Syrian men a feeling of fault, guilt, responsibility and pressure as implied by Yāsmīn, Abū Muhammad and Mu’ayad, unless this feeling was turned into celebrating one’s cleverness and access to power, as described by Firās.

Likewise, Anderson’s (2013: 468) analysis of the ‘politics of scorn’ in Syria is revealing in this context, since it shows his informants’ resignation and shame in knowing that they could not circumvent the state’s system even though they despised its unjust structures and immoral procedures. The daily involvement with unjust structures and the constant practice of immoral actions appeared to have led to a feeling of guilt or complicity. According to Rabo (2005: 151), bribery involves two parties tied together in creating a win-win situation for each other, but at the same time, divided by a sense of loss of dignity and respect for each other and for oneself. Thus, I contend that every interaction that included bribes or corruption created a sense of disrespect and denigration for oneself, the other and the circumstances under which one lives. The narratives mentioned above can then be understood as the various and diverse lines of reasoning of living and being involved in a corrupt system.

The main themes mentioned in the literature in relation to ‘immoral’ interactions with the state can be summarised as a loss of dignity and respect for oneself, others and one’s life, shame, humiliation, self-denigration and disgrace. I contend that Syrian men had to somehow make sense of these emotions. Treacher’s (2007: 292) analysis of Egypt’s colonial past that is related to a sense of shame and humiliation among men is relevant in this context. She argues that the experience of having been ruled by outsiders, of being excluded and denied complex personhood and agency caused the disintegration of the male ego and male self-perception that are usually firmly grounded on the illusion of coherence and control. Similarly, Joubin’s (2013: 211) analysis of Syrian soap operas brings to the forefront that the widespread corruption in Syrian society is depicted as making it increasingly difficult for a young man to remain a *qabādāy* – a decisive, honourable, and heroic man. Rather, men in the miniseries risk compromising and succumbing to the forces of societal evil leading to inferior masculinity. As far as masculinity formed in a system of corruption is concerned, I suggest that it is affected

and challenged by the gap between the knowledge of what is honourable and moral and the enforced adaptation and adjustment of one's morals in everyday reality.

The following discussion of other aspects of state control and surveillance and the impact on masculine identity adds to this debate and, by the end of this chapter, I will hopefully have been able to present a rich picture of the impact of living under dictatorial regimes on constructions of masculinity.

### ***Navigating encounters with the Egyptian state***

Anderson's (2013) and Rabo's (2014) works reflect a tension that is also described by anthropologist Samuli Schielke (2015) in his discussion of rural Egypt. Schielke (*ibid.*: 177) underlines that participating in the Egyptian labour market under Mubarak's rule pushed people towards immoral actions, such as stealing or cheating, as a necessity for survival. This has created a situation in which there is no clear-cut differentiation between oppressors and oppressed since the system urges everyone to be involved. According to Schielke (*ibid.*: 178/179), there was a deep awareness among Egyptians of the injustice of the system paired with participation in the very system they endured. In contrast to the tactics and responses observed by Anderson and Rabo, Schielke argues that in order to have at least some control over their situation and to maintain their dignity, many Egyptian men engage in illegal and immoral actions. Here, what is considered 'illegal action' by the state becomes a tool for men to regain agency. Thus, similarly to the other authors, Schielke highlights that living in an authoritarian state significantly impacts on the individual's negotiations of identity, work and life, on one's well-being and subjectivity. It can be argued, that in both Syria and Egypt, the division between the oppressor and the oppressed is to an extent hazy and indistinct, if the focus is on the individual's dependence on the system for one's survival. The individual has little choice but to be compliant, and to become (at least) a silent acceptor of the system, even if one is painfully aware of the system's immorality. By stating this, I do not mean to suggest that every Syrian is equal in their acquiescence in a totalitarian state, rather I argue that a totalitarian state manages to request at least adaptation from its citizens in return for survival and life in relative peace.

Based on the ethnographies presented above and their focus on how people negotiate opposition and complicity with the ruling system in both Egypt and Syria, several questions can be raised: What does it mean to leave a corrupt system behind only

to cross borders into a country in which a similar system is in place? Does this give the individual a sense of control and power over the situation? In the context of Syrians in Egypt, it appears that their experiences in Syria under an unjust and authoritarian regime ‘travelled’ with them and influenced their encounters with the Egyptian state, defined their reactions to such encounters, their daily fears and worries and their anticipation of trouble with both the Egyptian authorities and the Syrian embassy.

Abū Walīd, for instance, who was involved in pro-opposition activism in both Syria and Egypt, was imprisoned in both countries and had not only similar experiences but also used the same strategy of paying bribes to get out of prison. In Syria, his imprisonment by a Shia militia after the outbreak of the revolution ended because his parents paid the ransom to free him. Abū Walīd spoke with me about the immense danger in which he put his mother and the great risk she took when she met his kidnappers to hand over the requested sum. After his imprisonment, Abū Walīd had to leave Syria. He was told: “*intā ‘alayk shi!*” (you are wanted!), so he and his family arranged to leave Syria immediately. His flight to Egypt was only possible because his father paid bribes to obtain the travel documents for his son, and at the airport, so that Abū Walīd could leave without any problem. When Abū Walīd was imprisoned in Egypt, he was again dependent on the financial help of his parents to be able to get out of prison. He had vivid memories of the horror of his imprisonment and how his psychological state deteriorated afterwards.

“I used to go to Libya illegally (*tahrīb*) at that time, so did several Muslim Brotherhood supporters. They arrested all of us and delivered us to the Egyptians. The Egyptian police were surprised to find Syrians in the group. They said to the Syrians: You are with the Muslim Brotherhood. And this gave them an opportunity to blackmail us (*ibtizāz*). If we, the Syrians, wanted to be free, we had to pay. I paid a lot of money in order to call my family. I had to pay 1,500 LE. My family transferred money to me. I paid the colonel 5,000 LE to let me go. [...] Another time I was arrested in Downtown. The Muslim Brotherhood supporters were demonstrating, that’s why they were arrested, but I was not with them. I had the yellow card and the passports of my family with me. It was obvious that I had nothing to do with the demonstrations, but was on my way to the embassy. They beat me because I was Syrian and they considered me pro-Muslim Brotherhood. My charge was defined before they even interrogated me. I paid again. The existence of corruption in Egypt helped me a lot. It’s good that you can pay in

such a situation. I paid and left. After the imprisonment, my psychological state was really bad”.

Bribery is here described as a solution in a situation of absolute despair, and danger, in which human treatment and a fair handling of the imprisoned are not given. Furthermore, the opportunity for bribery was described as a lucky, positive tool that guaranteed Abū Walīd’s survival and temporary safety. In another situation, Abū Walīd contacted people working in the Syrian embassy to find out whether he was truly *maṭlūb* (wanted) by the Syrian regime. He bribed them to get this piece of information. Again, bribery was used to receive a crucial piece of information that had life-changing significance. Knowing that he was wanted in Syria and assuming that this piece of information was shared by the Syrian government with the Egyptian government made him reduce his presence on the streets of Cairo and his contact with Egyptians to an absolute minimum.

Mahmūd, as a tour guide for foreigners receiving many bank transfers from abroad, also had an encounter with the Egyptian authorities. He was contacted by the secret service (*amn al-dawla*), responsible for the economics section and asked to appear at their office. Scared and stressed, he did not know what to do and asked an Egyptian friend for advice. His friend suggested bringing a lawyer to the meeting and also recommended a good one. During the meeting, Mahmūd was asked why he received so many bank transfers from abroad. Through a contract with a hotel and by showing his website and Facebook page, Mahmūd was able to prove to the secret service that he was a tour guide and thus received income from abroad. The secret service was specifically interested in the money transfers he received from individuals who had names of Arabic origin. Mahmūd explained that several tourists he guided had grown up abroad and wanted to see the country of their ancestors. The secret service officer told him that they wanted to make sure that he did not receive this money for terrorist purposes. Mahmūd told me he was allowed to go after this interrogation. The Egyptian lawyer sat silently next to him throughout. When Mahmūd asked the security state office whether he should expect more trouble, he was told that he would have not been allowed to leave unless everything was considered fine. Mahmūd was convinced that the lawyer’s presence had been one of the main factors that helped Mahmūd in his encounter with the Egyptian authorities.

Abū Khālid, the community leader in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City, had an encounter with the Egyptian secret service in November 2014 and left Egypt shortly afterwards. His son explained to me that the secret service “didn’t seem to like his work of helping the Syrians

so they took him and interrogated him". Eventually, Khālid told me, the secret service recommended that Abū Khālid left Egypt for another country and should not plan to come back. It was not clear to me whether this was Abū Khālid's only reason and motivation for leaving Egypt. After the family's departure to Turkey, there were a lot of rumours: I was told that Abū Khālid and his family had kept donations that were intended for the Syrian community, got into trouble and thus decided to leave. With regards to his father's encounter with the Egyptians security service, Khālid, who communicated with me via Facebook and was his father's spokesman after he had left the country, said:

"My father wants to tell you that the security service doesn't take anything with good intentions. They don't believe you if you say that you want to help just because you consider it the right thing to do. So, Magdalena, try to avoid teaching in 6<sup>th</sup> of October city or limit it".

Not only did Khālid and Abū Khālid expect and describe the bad intentions of the security service and their denial of the existence of helpfulness as a reason for one's activities, they also assumed that anyone could come under the scrutiny of the regime and thus tried to warn me suggesting that I reduce my presence in and outreach to 6<sup>th</sup> of October city as a coping strategy.

Mu'ayad also had to come into contact with the Egyptian state. When he tried to apply for a residency permit for his cousin who was at that time in Syria, he spent hours and hours in the *Mugamm'a*, waiting for the papers to be processed. Eventually, he was told that there was a problem and that he could not finalise the papers of his cousin without a letter of authorisation. His cousin made some phone calls and Mu'ayad was phoned by an Egyptian friend of his cousin who told him to go to the office of a general in the *Mugamm'a*. The next day, Mu'ayad visited the employee's office and the bureaucratic procedures were completed within minutes. Mu'ayad did not describe this way of solving the problem as a heroic act of performing power. Instead he spoke of the fear and anxiety that haunted him during the process and the even bigger dread of causing problems for his cousin that made him accept his cousin's request to make use of *wasta*.

Abū Walīd, Maḥmūd, Abū Khālid and Mu'ayad were neither surprised nor entirely helpless when confronted with the Egyptian authorities. They had all experienced interrogation before, and in Abū Walīd's and Abū Khālid's cases, even imprisonment. It almost seemed to be normalised and they expected they would have to deal with the Egyptian security service at some point and that they would have to make use of certain methods and coping strategies, such as bribery or *wasta* when dealing with the Egyptian

authorities. All of them reacted pragmatically, thinking of solutions that could ease their situation and using techniques that were common in Syria. This did not mean that they felt proud, empowered, ‘smart’ or in control of the situation. Instead, according to Mu’ayad, paying bribes could rather be perceived as a necessary and familiar tool to be used in Egypt, whose system resembled many aspects of that in Syria. Abū Walīd’s encounter with and handling of the interaction with the authorities particularly resonates with Parry’s work (2000), in which he analyses corrupt activities in India. He argues that corruption persists among his interlocutors and even proceeds on rather low levels of trust in the middleman, because of despair, hopelessness, fear and the conviction that corruption is the only way out of one’s miserable situation. Similarly, I argue that corruption was perceived as a means to circumvent greater problems, as a measure applied in times of despair, and as a tool to save oneself.

Connecting what the four Syrian men experienced to an analysis of displacement could bring us to the conclusion that the experience of loss of network and lack of in-depth knowledge about the context they lived in were, in their cases, partially retrieved. Based on their previous experiences in Syria, the four men handled their encounters with the Egyptian state by applying measures, such as bribery or making use of *wasta*, to resolve their issues. Despite the high level of stress and anxiety all of them felt during their encounter with the Egyptian authorities, it could be argued that they retrieved a sense of agency and control over the situation, thus countering the loss that defined their experience of displacement. This could even be analysed as a way of regaining masculinity constituted through “mastery, activity and power” (Treacher 2007: 292). However, while it is tempting to define the described narratives as a reclaiming of power and control over one’s situation and a consequent boost for one’s position as a man, the humble and reluctant way in which the four men described their encounters with the Egyptian state made me analyse them in a less positive way. Fear and despair were the driving forces behind their engagement in bribery, *wasta* and corruption. They were vulnerable with regards to their status in Egypt, could not assess the uncertain economic and political future of the country, had just experienced a rise in xenophobia among the Egyptians, and had great deal to lose. Nevertheless, in one way or another they were forced to deal with the Egyptian state – an opponent, whose corrupt system and disrespect for human rights was well known to them.

Consequently, instead of understanding their experiences with bribery and use of connections in Egypt as winning back agency and control over their lives, I argue that the engagement in bribery, *wasta* and corruption in the new country of residency was an even

more dangerous endeavour. Even though coping strategies were known from their life in Syria, in the new context in Egypt, Syrian men lacked contacts, networks and practical experiences and were thus in an even more precarious situation when being forced to engage in bribing or making use of *wasta*. In a similar way to anthropologist Luigi Achilli (2015: 272), who conducted research among Palestinian refugees in Jordan, I contend that the hardship many refugees experience relates to the actual lack of *wasta* in terms of family connections and relationships of patronage. Hence, rather than celebrating a regaining of power among Syrian men in Cairo I argue that the loss of the “entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world” (Arendt 1973: 293) is aggravated. This means that masculinity during displacement in a corrupted, authoritarian state is more likely to be defined by the opposite of Treacher’s definition of masculinity in terms of ‘mastery, activity and power’, namely, impotence to be in full control of the situation, being forced to react rather than being in the position to act freely, and incomprehension and weakness based on one’s position in Egypt.

### ***Omnipresent fear***

Another aspect of life under the Syrian authoritarian regime that was often mentioned in my conversations with Syrian men was the ubiquitous fear of the Syrian *mukhābarāt*. Perthes (1995: 146) describes the Syrian security apparatus as an influential agency of social and political control and economic power. Through open *mukhābarāt* surveillance, the Syrian regime could maintain an atmosphere of uncertainty, fear and compliance. The omnipresent and powerful intelligence service infiltrated deeply into Syrian society and conditioned the behaviour of the citizens. Dealing with the security service became part of people’s strategies for survival (*ibid.*: 148). The regime managed to cultivate and sustain a ‘culture of fear’ that had ramifications for all kinds of social relations (Geros cited in van Eijk 2016: 12/13). Government intelligence relied on its citizens spying on their surroundings, relatives and contacts, and reporting any suspicious activity to the state (Galie and Yildiz 2005: 34). The knowledge that anyone could work for the *mukhābarāt* and could pass on information, even family members, created a general sense of distrust, suspicion and self-censorship amongst many Syrians (Van Eijk 2016: 13). According to Rabo (2015: 115), Syrians lived in a country of fear “where one half of the population was said to spy on the other half”. The reputation as well as the invisibility of

the *mukhābarāt* discouraged any freedom of expression in Syria (Galie and Yildiz 2005: 34). Ziadeh (2013: 24) defines the Syrian security apparatus as an “Orwellian system of surveillance.” Syrians were aware of the danger of speaking in public, the unchecked power of the security services, the absence of rule-of-law, and how *mukhābarāt* officials made use of their position of power (Perthes 1995: 149). Joubin (2013: 297) highlights the invasion of the privacy of innocent citizens by the Syrian security service as well as the arbitrariness and limitless power of security officers.

Arendt’s analysis of police rule in totalitarian countries offers a critical lens to the analysis of the omnipresent fear among Syrians of the Syrian secret service. She argued that places of detention in totalitarian countries are turned by the police into “veritable holes of oblivion into which people stumble by accident and without leaving behind such organising traces of former existence as a body and a grave” (Arendt 1973: 434). Her statement reinforces the arbitrariness with which the secret service operates in totalitarian regimes and the tactic of forced disappearances, often used to not simply kill a person, but to delete the person’s presence completely. Both aspects are relevant in the later discussion of Syrian men’s experiences with the Syrian secret service. Arendt (*ibid.*: 433) contended that with regard to forced disappearances, one of the biggest challenges for the police is to erase the memory of the people, who disappear, among those who loved them. She argued that the traditional dream of the totalitarian police of knowing the truth changed and became the “modern police dream” to possess a map that shows the relationships, connections and the degree of intimacy between people (*ibid.*: 433/434). Consistent randomness and arbitrariness in the choice of victims by the part of the totalitarian regime has the potential to “negate human freedom more efficiently than any tyranny ever could” (*ibid.*: 432/433). Even though opposition remains a theoretical choice in one’s life under totalitarian regimes, its performance is worthless since opposition members can only expect the same punishment that everyone else might also have to bear. Another argument that Arendt (*ibid.*: 435) put forward is the knowledge the population has about actions undertaken by the secret service; at the same time, the people know that it is “the greatest crime ever to talk about these ‘secrets’”.

In order to apply Arendt’s insight to the context of the Syrian state, it is relevant to point out whether there was a difference in the perception of the Syrian police (*shurṭa*) and the Syrian *mukhābarāt* among the people I spoke to. According to Perthes (2000: 155), both entities fall under the Syrian security apparatus in addition to the regular armed forces, conscripts drafted into the army or police each year, and a huge number of civilians employed in companies run by the Ministry of Defence. It is obvious in the

accounts of many Syrians that the police were associated with power, control and enjoyed the support of the Syrian state. In addition, the Syrian police were assumed to be biased, fuelled sectarian rivalry, and played a crucial role in aggravating the conflict that led to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. Abū Walīd described the police's bias by referring to a situation in which a Shia who bought something from a Sunni and was not satisfied with the quality of the item and thus wanted to return it. When the Sunni refused to take it back, the Shia went to the police and then the police closed the Sunni's shop and "treat[ed] the Sunni very badly because the Shia [was] automatically right".

Apart from these direct characteristics ascribed to the police it is striking that, in several accounts, there was no clear-cut differentiation between the police and the *mukhābarāt* relating to the power and control ascribed to both entities interchangeably. 'Abd al-Rahman remembered that every time he came back to Syria from Egypt where he studied between 2006 and 2011 "someone from the Syrian security" came to him:

"Sometimes I would arrive very late at night even without telling any of my friends; still in the morning the security (*al-amn*) will knock on my door to tell me: 'Good to have you back!'. It is a police state (*dawlat būlīsiyya*). They were asking me: 'What did you do in Egypt?' [...] I always told them that I am a student and that I just study in Egypt and come here in the holidays nothing more. This was called political investigation".

In 'Abd al-Rahman's account, the distinction between security service, police state and political investigation are blurred. For him the individual who knocks at his door to investigate him seems to resemble all of these notions at the same time. 'Abd al-Rahman's narrative not only sheds light on the hazy distinction between police and security service, but also hints at high level of surveillance Syrians were subjected to. Feldman (2000: 47), analysing the conflict in Northern Ireland, highlights that "the linkage between the penetration of the domestic space and the penetration of the body directly captures the psychic effect of the surveillance grid." The scopic penetration of the domestic space does not only contaminate the private sphere but also one's life (*ibid.*). And indeed, 'Abd al-Rahman's memory shows the total disruption of, and disregard for, his home and his privacy.

In contrast to the police, the *mukhābarāt* – who, according to Mu'ayad, were the organisation people really feared (*al-nās takhāf minhu*) – were often associated with even more power than the police, because they had the ability to kill or abduct someone and act completely arbitrarily. Their power was assumed to reach every part of Syria.

According to Perthes (2000: 154), the *mukhābarāt* have “virtually unchecked powers and a long record of arbitrary encroachments on the freedom and property of citizens”.

Foucault’s analysis of the panopticon can add to Arendt’s insight about the police in a totalitarian regime. According to Foucault (1980: 39), surveillance is a tool that reaches the “very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and inserts into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives”. Surveillance can thus be understood as ubiquitous, a defining marker of every aspect of one’s life and becomes part of body and mind. Furthermore, Foucault (*ibid.*: 155) argues that the system of surveillance, established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, caused an interiorising to the point that the individual becomes his or her own overseer. Consequently, surveillance can be considered an extremely powerful tool, in which the individual is an accomplice of those carrying out the surveillance by exercising control over one’s action. The specificity of the panopticon is that each individual, depending on their position in the system, feels constantly watched and controlled by all or certain others. This causes circulating and omnipresent mistrust (*ibid.*: 158). Foucault’s perception of surveillance and his analysis of the panopticon clarify how powerfully a security service of a totalitarian regime can impact on the individual and has the ability to change behaviour, self-image, activities, bodily sentiments and learning.

Coming back to the omnipresent fear of the Syrian security service, Māzin, a student of dentistry from Homs, described the security apparatus and suspicion of being overheard in Syria using two idioms I heard frequently during conversations.

“We used to say that *al- ḥayṭān ilha adān* (the walls have ears). It was difficult to talk about this (he refers to criticizing the regime). If you talk, *haywadūk warā al-shams* (they will take you behind the sun). Since the revolution started up until now, you still find people who are afraid to speak”.

What Māzin’s account illustrates is people’s constant paranoia of being spied on and controlled by the regime’s informants if they wanted to voice their opinion about politics. Describing the endurance of the fear to speak out, Māzin furthermore confirms anthropologist Elaine Combs-Schilling’s argument that “durable systems of domination are often ones in which the structures of power are so embedded within the body of self that the self cannot be easily abstracted from them” (1991: 658 cited in Peteet 1994). Maḥmūd interpreted the idiom ‘*haywadūk warā al-shams*’ in the following way: “they will take you and no one will know where you are”, and Mu’ayad translated it as “forced disappearances”. Both translations suggest the cruel consequences people can expect if

they speak critically about politics in public. The anticipation of unknown but real punishment when citizens express their political opinion in authoritarian regimes is defined by Wedeen (1999: 147) as an effective way for the regime to consolidate its power and enforce the citizens' obedience. Furthermore, the idiom *Mahmūd* used echoes Arendt's analysis of the strategies of the secret police in totalitarian regimes. As described above, she argued that it was the modern dream of the police to not only kill a person, but to also eliminate his or her presence and memory.

The ubiquitous suspicion that one's words might be overheard and one's actions might be controlled led, according to Bashār, to a misrepresentation of politics and an inability to imagine a variety of opinions.

"Maybe in Syria we have a different mentality than people in other countries. Our thinking was focused on how to work. There was only one party and no other political parties, which made us hear one opinion only. There was no opposition. You only hear one opinion. There were no discussions at all except in closed rooms. When they wanted to speak in closed rooms they even kicked out the children so they could not share what has been discussed at home in front of others. If these kids had said anything you would have gotten many problems. We used to hear about the events and about what happened in the 1980s. We heard that many people were killed, but no one would speak clearly about it. We used to hear it but I personally didn't care about it and didn't pay much attention to it".

Bashār portrayed the anxiety of the older generation to express their opinions, to mention the regime-induced massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in the 1980s<sup>9</sup>, their fear of spies and lack of trust even in their children. He links this state of mind to the absence of opposition, vague and opaque knowledge and lack of diversity of opinions. The self-censorship that results from the feeling of a constant gaze on oneself, as described by Foucault, heavily impacts on information that is shared and accessible. Furthermore, his narrative shows that the all-pervading fear induced by the totalitarian regime created suspicion, also theorised by Foucault, and distance among the citizens and fostered a sense of loneliness.

Moreover, Bashār's account relates to Wedeen's (2013: 865) analysis of a Syrian TV serial in which the government's informer in a rural community decides to leave his

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<sup>9</sup> In the 1980s, anti-regime opposition was growing and was led by the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Recurring clashes and violent uprisings took place and the regime was unable to gain the upper hand (Perthes 1995: 137). In 1982, the army bombarded Hama – a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood, and killed an estimated 10,000 people. The effects of this period were still visible in Syria up until the uprising in 2011, since thousands of Syrians were still imprisoned, killed or had disappeared (Rabo 2014).

job. The villagers are in terror because they do not know whether the spy's replacement is already among them collecting information. While every villager announces in public that they would not take over the job no one can be sure that friends, neighbours or their spouses are actually telling the truth. Eventually, the villages choose the certainty of the known and expected coercion over the inability to locate the informer and bring the old spy back into service. According to Wedeen (2013: 864), the episode shows how conditions of authoritarian rule are reproduced based on people's dread and their choice to 'wear blinders'. Even though my interlocutors' narratives do not confirm that they preferred to 'wear blinders' Wedeen's insight is useful because it resonates with Bashār's description of the lack of trust in everyone, the constant wondering who could leak information and the total absence of a safe space.

Using the example of his father's imprisonment, Khālid described what could happen to someone who was not afraid to speak about politics in public and had "knowledge about what's going on in the world". Because "he talk[ed] about what is in his heart" and said what he thought about the government, his father's name was mentioned to the government by an informer – an old school friend of his, a couple of years before the outbreak of the uprising. Soon after, the whole family was woken up one night by someone knocking on their door. When Abū Khālid asked, who was outside, the answer was: 'we're the police (*shurṭa*)!' "They didn't say 'we're the intelligence (*mukhābarāt*)!'", Khālid recalled. Then, ten heavily armed men entered their flat and searched it. They took Abū Khālid with them saying he would only undergo interrogation and would be back after two hours. Eventually, he returned after forty-five days of imprisonment. Fifteen days after Abū Khālid's disappearance the family was informed where he was. In prison, Abū Khālid was interrogated repeatedly, described by Khālid in the following way:

"They made him repeat his life story lots of times. They do this to find out if he is lying. If he is lying ones and forgets that he will make a mistake the next time he has to tell his life story. He just wanted to get out and do nothing but obey. However, once my father didn't want to answer and the officer said: 'if you don't answer we'll get your wife here!'. My father kicked him but he was handcuffed and blindfolded".

Khālid's description of his father's imprisonment sheds light on various issues: the danger of being politically aware and speaking about it in public; the possibility of being betrayed by one's acquaintances; the inability to differentiate between the police and the security

service; the absolute power of the regime; the illegitimate and inhumane measures of the authorities, and compliance as the only possible response and the only way out.

### ***Living under state oppression***

When Qays tried to describe the situation of the Syrian people vis-à-vis the Syrian regime to me he used the following, evocative sentence: “the regime sat on the chest of the people for the past 45 years (*al-nizām kān yajlas ‘ala ṣidr al-nās lī mudda khamsa wa arba ‘īn sinna*)!”. What he describes is a constant state of suffocation, narrowness and the inability to move or free oneself from the tight grip of the regime.

A useful frame for the discussion of living under surveillance, control and oppression and its effect on the people is Kleinman’s (2000) analysis of the impact of Maoist totalitarian control on Chinese people, in which he argues that regulation of movement, suppression of free speech and the contradiction between state propaganda and lived reality evoked a “deep reservoir of rancour, bitter resentment, [and] fantasies of revenge.” Being controlled by a totalitarian system also induced feelings of powerlessness, enforced passivity and numbness (ibid.). Kleinman (2000: 238) argues that the daily presence of violence, normalised through hierarchy and inequality, creates fear, anger and loss. Through violence in social experiences the lives of individuals are shaped, and “all-too-often twisted, bent, even broken” (ibid.).

Jackson (2002: 44), referring to Kleinman’s analysis, contends that living under such circumstances evokes social death, a “disempowering descent into passivity and privacy, solitude and silence.” A person’s humanity is violated when their status is reduced to objectivity, since it denies this person the ability to exist in any active or social relationship to others. Instead, this person has experienced “nullification” of their being and can only exist in a passive relationship to themselves without a place in collectivity (ibid.: 45). Citing W.H. Auden, Jackson (ibid.) comes to the conclusion that the consequence of living under a totalitarian regime is that “men die as men before their bodies die”.

Joubin (2013) highlights the relation between government oppression and loss of manhood. In one of the soap operas she analyses, the consequence of having succumbed one’s manhood to government oppression is that the main actor cannot protect his wife from being harassed by another man (ibid.: 299). Similarly, Ismail (2006: 113) illustrates how state control and oppression cause a sense of loss of masculinity among young

Egyptian men in a low-income neighbourhood of Cairo. Police raids, repression and monitoring are experienced as humiliation, infringement on one's dignity and sense of self, and create persistent fear that the police could exercise their power again (*ibid.*: 121). The humiliation experienced at the hand of the police translates into the enactment of control over women's mobility and presence in public as a strategy of restitution (*ibid.*: 122).

The following accounts show the effects of state surveillance: feelings of fear, domination and enforced compliance. 'Abd al-Rahman compared the situation in Syria with his experiences in Egypt, when he first came to study in Cairo during the then-President Mubarak's rule. He remembered his surprise on finding Egyptians cursing and mocking Mubarak in public.

"When I arrived in Cairo I saw freedom. It is true that Hosni Mubarak was a dictator and that he was trying to starve the people in order to prevent them from actively engaging in politics, however, I saw a kind of freedom that you might not find in Syria even after fifty years. Freedom did exist in Mubarak's era. The president was cursed while he was still in power and no one said anything. I remember a meeting of the Arab league, for which the Arab presidents came together. I was watching the meeting in a coffee shop. I think it was the summit number twenty in Damascus and President Mubarak was absent back then. I heard one of the people, who were watching with me, saying: 'Where is our dog?' if these words had been said in Syria, not only the guy who said it but also his whole family would have disappeared".

'Abd al-Rahman portrayed a situation of relative freedom of speech under Mubarak's rule in Egypt that he had not seen in Syria. As suggested by Arendt (1973: 433/434), not only the fear for one's own life but also the fear of losing loved ones controls people and makes them compliant in a totalitarian regime. With regards to Syria, 'Abd al-Rahman drew a dark picture:

"In general, each Syrian child was aware of the care of his parents. The parents looked after him, however, there were external factors impacting on him. He was not allowed to talk, was always ruled, always suppressed, couldn't express his freedom, couldn't write a story or a poem, couldn't talk about any subject related to the state until the beginning of the Syrian revolution (*thawra*). The Syrian revolution came to set the country free of the dictatorship, the rule of Bashar al-Assad".

After a while, he continued:

“After we finished the preparatory and the secondary school we realised that we can't talk about anything. Not about freedom. Not about improving our lives. We couldn't talk about the fact that we are ruled by the Alawite sect, and we were beaten up or humiliated by our parents in order not to talk about the aforementioned topics because they were worried about us”.

The child in ‘Abd al-Rahman’s account is in a paradoxical state of feeling at the same time taken care of and protected in his family, and left alone, unprotected and controlled by his surroundings. Schizophrenically, there is, on the one hand care, warmth and protection, and on the other, an external threat that invades the private sphere and denies the child his agency, freedom of expression, artistic development and even leads to punishment by the parents.

Mu’ayad and his friend Laith similarly described dealing with the presence of the *mukhābarāt* in their lives as a slow process of learning and adapting. Said Laith:

“In school, we were taught that al-Assad was the right and only president. We didn’t hear any other opinion. There was one TV only and it showed only state channels. This was the same in the whole street – so how could we build another opinion? At some point in our lives, we learned about the existence of the secret service and we learnt to include this knowledge in our everyday lives. You realise that there is something fishy, but no one would tell you anything until you are a bit older (*kibīr fil-‘omr shway*)”.

Both ‘Abd al-Rahman’s and Laith’s description of the external control that the child experiences resonate with Foucault’s as well as Combs-Schilling’s insights about surveillance mentioned above. Surveillance conquers the individual’s body, mind and learning. From a very young age, the child feels an external power that controls his life and reduces his freedom of expression, agency and space for critical thinking. ‘Abd al-Rahman’s narrative further corresponds to Schmitt’s analysis of objectification, which he defines as a “carefully orchestrated and systematic refusal of genuinely human relations” (Schmitt 1996: 36). Through objectification, the subjectivity of the oppressed is devalued and dehumanised (Hill Collins 1996: 18). It could thus be argued that the Syrian regime aimed to, and was partially successful in transforming its citizens into mere devalued, broken objects, devoid of their own subjectivity, agency or autonomy and unable to engage in human relations.

In a similar vein to ‘Abd al-Rahman, Majd portrayed the situation in Syria, clearly indicating that freedom of speech was unimaginable:

“The majority of people were against him [Bashar al-Assad], but our families used to tell us always that ‘the walls have ears’. We were prohibited from talking about politics at all. Even if I saw corruption in an institution I was not allowed to report about it in a newspaper, on TV or in any place. If you and I had this conversation in Syria, I would be dead”.

For Majd, it was painful to recognise injustice without being able to acknowledge, criticise or report it. Held back by the advice of his family and the expectation of being killed he has to accept what he considers wrong, immoral behaviour.

It is noteworthy that ‘Abd al-Rahman, Majd and Bashār all highlight the serious consequences they expect once they speak out critically in public. The mechanism of control through anticipation of punishment described by Wedeen defined these men’s statements, and arguably their actions. Importantly, Majd further expressed that the fear of sharing one’s opinion was lasting and kept Syrians from expressing their opinions in Egypt, even though they were no longer under the direct threat of punishment at the hands of the regime:

Magdalena: Can you talk about politics here in Egypt?

Majd: “Yes, you are outside of Syria so it’s no problem. Nevertheless, some people are still worried about their relatives in Syria and that’s why they are not talking about politics here in Egypt. If the regime finds this out, those people in Syria will be in danger. In Syria, you cannot oppose anything. You are deprived of your own opinion. This is how the regime works. As for my friends and I, we are talking about politics but some of them are also afraid of doing so because of their relatives, besides their name could be put on the list of *maflūb* people by the regime”.

Despite being a long distance from Syria, many Syrians in Egypt do not voice their opinions out of fear for their loved ones. As described by Arendt (1973: 433/434), the totalitarian regime does not only threaten the individual’s well-being but also knows about the individual’s connection to loved ones. This adds another layer of stress and enforces compliance in a perfidious way, even if the individual is no longer in the immediate scope or outreach of the regime.

Enforced loneliness, silence and isolation, as described by Jackson at the beginning of this section, are indeed detectable in my interviewees’ accounts. Due to the

pressure and all-pervading fear of the regime and its security service that accompanied Syrians through their daily lives, it appears that Syrian men I met as well as their contacts reduced their exchanges about politics, their expression of opinions and individuality to an absolute minimum and silence occurred where exchange would have been desired. The humiliation understood as loss of masculinity, described by Joubin and Ismail, is expressed in Syrian men's narratives when they refer to the total deprivation of agency and the worthlessness and dishonour related to being forced to comply. Thus, it can be argued that Syrian men 'die as men before their bodies die' because of their experience of constant surveillance; the anticipation of severe consequences for themselves or their families if they disobey; their consequent self-censorship; and their objectification by the hands of the state, which denied them agency, individuality and the ability to show backbone and protection for loved ones. Mu'ayad summarised this sentiment well when he asked me: "Aren't men supposed to provide for and protect their family? So how do you think men feel under such oppression? They feel useless".

Even though Syrian men did not speak about themselves explicitly as 'dead men', what reverberates from Mu'ayad's description of men feeling useless in an authoritarian system because of their inability to be the family provider is clearly as sense of men dying inside before their bodies die, as suggested by Auden and conceptualised by Jackson.

### ***The migration of fear***

The omnipresent fear and suspicion did not stop at the Syrian border, but travelled with many of my interlocutors to Egypt. Most Syrians, who eventually agreed to be interviewed for my research only did so after they had made sure that their names, and other details of their backgrounds would not be mentioned, and several of my interlocutors refused to have their voices recorded. They carefully selected the places we could meet for the interviews: usually in their family home, at their workplace or, more rarely, in cafés, where they had a personal relationship with the staff.

The fear of the *mukhābarāt*, their omnipresence and survival techniques impacted on Syrian men's encounter with other Syrians in Egypt. Hānī said:

"At the beginning [in Egypt] I faced problems. For example, if I meet you and I know that you are Syrian it is difficult for me to tell you immediately that I am with the revolution. I will think that it is possible that you were sent by the regime. By the way, this happened with me".

Again, Hānī shows that Syrian men live with a constant suspicion, wondering whether the all-pervading gaze of the Syrian regime made it all the way to Egypt. This reduces opportunities to get in touch with other Syrians and paves the way for the existence of a non-community as described in the previous chapter.

Syrian men's fear and anxiety were also noticeable when they spoke about the Syrian embassy in Cairo. Mu'ayad described the embassy in the district of Dokki as having the exact shape and appearance of a *mukhābarāt* branch back in Syria. He thus makes a revealing comparison especially when framing his statement with literature revolving around how different forms of material culture, such as uniforms, documents or buildings are central to "how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population" (Sharma and Gupta 2006:12 cited in Hull 2012: 260). The Syrian embassy, following Mu'ayad, with its architectural shape indicates resentment and seems to intend to remind the visitor of the power and presence of the Syrian regime.

Generally, the Syrian embassy had a very bad reputation and most Syrians I met tried to avoid setting foot in it whenever they could. It was perceived as the long arm of the regime and many horrible stories grew around it. Abū Walīd, for instance, shared with me the devastating story of an acquaintance of his: the Egyptian secret service had arrested his friend, and had handed him over to the Syrian embassy in Cairo from where he was taken to Syria, where he was murdered. Sāmir, who worked in an NGO providing aid to refugees, told me about the case of a Syrian contact of his, who had relatives in Syria that supported the opposition. This man went to the Syrian embassy in Cairo to renew his passport. When the employees at the embassy saw his name, they connected it to his brother in Syria, who was with the FSA. His passport was immediately destroyed and he was requested to enter the embassy. However, he ignored their request and ran away fearing consequences.

Following Feldman (2000: 48), such rumours and stories that circulated among Syrians are the necessary complement to the diffuse, capillary system of state surveillance. Through these rumours the state apparatus achieves visibility and physical presence. And indeed, the undefined but present power of the Syrian state had become localised in the form of the Syrian embassy.

Abū Walīd compared the Syrian embassy in Egypt to "the ministry of the interior", since it had the "power to arrest anyone". Based on what happened to his friend, Abū Walīd was tremendously afraid of any interaction with the Syrian embassy and with the Egyptian security service:

“I am *matlūb* by the government. They will arrest me. And if I have any problem with the Egyptians, I will end up in the embassy and the embassy will send me to Syria, just as happened to my friend. The Syrian embassy has power. Now I am only going from my flat to the shop and back. I try to avoid any contact with the Egyptians because I am afraid that the embassy has already shared my name with the Egyptian *mukhābarāt*. I always try to avoid the embassy. Even if they ask for documents, I don’t go”.

Abū Walīd’s fear of the Syrian security apparatus has extended to include not only the Syrian embassy, perceived as the long arm of the regime, but also, the Egyptian authorities as collaborators with the Syrian regime. His situation suggests that being a refugee is not only related to the heightened importance of documents and papers, as described in the first chapter, but also to a constant negotiation of various constraints. If Abū Walīd risked not going to the embassy to get the documents he needed to work, drive or enrol his children in school in Egypt, he would face numerous problems in his daily life. However, if he yielded to the pressure that he was exposed to by not having the documents and went to the embassy, his life could be in danger because of his past in Syria and the cruelty of the Syrian regime. He had to weigh up and negotiate the two evils. Furthermore, Abū Walīd’s situation powerfully illustrates how the power of the citizenship-giving state does not stop at the border, but follows refugees into exile, where it still has the strength to influence, affect and control their lives. It thus confirms Gupta’s argument that the cultural practices by which the state is symbolically represented “cannot be conceptualized as a closed domain circumscribed by national boundaries” (Gupta 1995: 377).

Likewise, for Akram, who desperately needed to go to the embassy in order to get married legally in Egypt, the embassy represented the ubiquitous power and absolute sway of the Syrian regime.

“The embassy presses on us if we want to renew or apply for documents because they relate our situation here to our military situation back in Syria. There are documents that you cannot apply for unless you have finished your military service in Syria. This is the pressure coming from the Syrian government, which follows us everywhere and always, always, always...”.

Sarcastically he continued: “The beautiful thing is that if I have a problem and I want to resolve it, my embassy tells me to bring a document from Syria that I completed my military service. However, I escaped from Syria in order not to do the military service!”.

Akram described how the Syrian regime haunted him wherever he was and that he, even though he had physically escaped the country, could not escape the regime's procedures, control, gaze and regulations. He is in a vulnerable situation since the Syrian state could even control and impair his life abroad – because he had not completed what the state defined as his male responsibilities.

Anthropologist Linda Green (1994: 227) analysed fear in Guatemala as “a way of life”, “a chronic condition” and a “collective imagination”. She argues that fear is a reality “that is factored into the choices women and men make” (*ibid.*: 227). In this chapter, I have expanded her argument by suggesting that the omnipresent fear and suspicion Syrians experienced in their home country did not stop at the Syrian border. In fact, it was mobile and not geographically fixed and located, but travelled with many of my interlocutors to Egypt where it connected itself with the embassy, ‘other’ Syrians and foreigners.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has shown the importance of paying attention to men’s position vis-à-vis the state of origin and the state of asylum when conceptualising masculinity in the context of forced displacement. The state’s security apparatus had left a mark on Syrian men, fixing in them a form of suspicion, self-surveillance and anxiety they could not get rid of. Growing up in Syria meant learning to live with an omnipresent and controlling state and this knowledge instilled self-control in Syrian men when it came to the expression of their political opinion, their interests and ideas.

Furthermore, this chapter has discussed how most Syrian men struggled to come to terms with the criminality of the Syrian regime: they knew that the regime and its authorities engaged in illegal activities, such as accepting bribes, and Syrian men were aware that the state’s criminality dragged them into the same illegal structures. They had to comply with a system that was immoral in most men’s eyes, and they blamed the state for the immorality enforced on them. They were aware that the state had significant control over their lives, potential, development and aspirations. Having grown up under a dictatorial regime and having fled to a country with a similar regime impacted on Syrian men’s everyday lives and caused shame, self-censorship, suspicion, anxiety, depression, isolation and anger.

I suggest that the palpable presence of the Egyptian and Syrian states in men's everyday lives affected their sense of manhood: it bent and twisted them to an extent that they were unable to develop and show agency, subjectivity, selfhood and the ability to protect their loved ones from suffering the same fate. Syrian men reported to experience that they were left with no other option but enforced obedience and adaptation to the authoritarian systems they lived under; no way to break free from the ubiquitous states; and no opportunity to convey the knowledge they had to their children and loved ones to give them access to a better, more informed, self-determined life.

Ultimately, this chapter has illustrated how Syrian men move on from a form of paradoxical, insecure citizenship to a similarly insecure status as refugees in Egypt. Both legal statuses require interactions with the state that do not conform with Syrian men's morals and values. The overriding theme defining interactions with both states is the anticipation of severe consequences for oneself and one's loved ones if one does not accept the states' practices, and thus, men endure constant anxiety and engage in self-censorship.

With its focus on state-induced fear, this chapter sheds light on how living under an authoritarian regime destabilises notions of manhood and threatens the contours of masculinity. Fear and discomfort accompanied the transition from citizen under an authoritarian regime to refugee in an authoritarian host state. Syrian men's notion of fear was active, in motion, attaching to new objects and persons in Egypt. The focus on uncomfortable practices, such as making use of *wasta* and bribes, shows that men both back in Syria and in Egypt were in the first place reactive and responsive to the authoritarian system and had to juggle their morals, values and beliefs with their economic survival.

**Chapter 7 – *Of Sadness, Shock and Despair***  
**or Being a man vis-à-vis militarisation, war and the uprising**

Having discussed Syrian men’s various encounters with the Syrian state and how it affected their lives during forced displacement in Egypt, I turn in this chapter to a discussion of Syrian men’s experiences of militarisation and war preparation in Syria. Furthermore, I focus on the predominantly negative meaning ascribed to the military service and the army. In the narratives that were presented to me, men were critical of the militarisation of their lives in Syria and distanced themselves from the army, the regime’s war propaganda and the usefulness of the military service, even though they did not have the option to circumvent mandatory military service or military camps in their youth. Most Syrian men I met did not identify with aspects of militant masculinity in their past and present, and sought and presented instead other paths to acceptable masculinity. Hence, I contend that literature defining an inherent relation with masculinity and military combat fails to incorporate the experiences of men who do not wish to fight and therefore act accordingly.

Furthermore, I engage in a debate about the specific vulnerability of young men. Young men were defined in several narratives as the main reason for the whole family deciding to leave Syria. In other accounts, it was the parents’ decision that their young male offspring had to leave Syria on their own at the beginning of the uprising. Then, I focus on how Syrian men experienced the uprising describing subsequent changes in their feelings, and its impact on their life in Egypt. For some men, the uprising felt like a threshold to maturity, while others felt that the experience of the outbreak of the civil war numbed their emotions or evoked a previously unknown sense of fear and anxiety in them.

The versions of acceptable manhood Syrian men adopted in exile, namely, being a pacifist or a father, which I present towards the end of this chapter, show that masculinity is subjectively and actively constructed (Connell 1995; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003) and that men form masculinities by weaving in attitudes, behaviours and practices they find available in their specific social context (Wentzell 2015). As argued by Butler (1999), identities, and in this case masculinities, are performative and constituted in accordance with the existent framework of acceptable gender roles. Syrian men presented themselves by discursively adopting versions of manhood they considered

acceptable and honorable vis-à-vis their current situation as refugees in Egypt, in which fighter masculinity was unavailable to them.

Ultimately, this chapter is about the nuanced responses to violence, military combat and militarisation in my participants' life and challenges any direct, homogeneous linkage between masculinity, war and fighting. This chapter is on the one hand, a powerful example to undergird that masculinity is actively created and composed, subject to the specific circumstances in which a man finds himself. In their search for acceptable alternatives to militant masculinity, some Syrian men proved that construction of masculinities meant strategizing and assessing one's options in order to reach a stance that is worthy, accepted and beneficial. On the other hand, however, this chapter highlights the powerlessness, depression and anxiety that cannot be incorporated in any form of positive and successful masculine selfhood.

### ***Growing up in a state of 'war' and militarisation***

In Syria and in the Middle East, wars, conflicts and upheavals were a regular feature of life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Owen (2000: 325) argues that the number of wars, the effect of the memory of past wars, and the permanent fear of the outbreak of a new one have had a strong influence on politics and economic and social arrangements in the region. Syria fought against Israel in 1948, 1967 and 1973 and has lost part of its territory to Israel. Furthermore, Syria's army was active in Lebanon: it entered the neighbouring state in 1976 to 'regulate' its civil war (Rabo 2005: 66). Perthes (2000: 151) argues that in Syria, militarisation and war preparation were not a prelude to actual war making but instead "an end in itself" that had political, social, and domestic benefits. Moreover, he contends that in the discourse of the Syrian government, the preparation for a potential war against Israel had always been given absolute primacy (*ibid.*).

According to Edward Ziter (2015: 61), who analyses Syrian theatre, the Syrian regime tried to erase the memory of the 1967 defeat and its consequent territorial loss, while the 1973 war was omnipresent and celebrated in textbooks, monuments, war panoramas and government buildings. He argues that war was transformed into an "abstraction" in the background of everyday life in Syria (*ibid.*: 57). The conflict with Israel can be furthermore defined as a national trauma and an on-going fear in Syria's citizens of losing more of their homeland. Ziter (*ibid.*: 61) asserts that the theatre plays, which followed the 1967 war with Israel, illustrate men's suffering because of their defeat

in war and their experiences of oppression by the Syrian authorities. War, trauma and self-contempt are thus linked to Israel's victory and to living under a dictatorial regime. Aghacy (2009: 5), approaching the theme from the discipline of comparative literature, considers the war with Israel in 1967 a threat to everything that was assumed to be constant and undisputable. It not only instilled a feeling of constant fear and threat in Syrian citizens, but also caused a male trauma because of men's feeling of incapability to change the outcome of the war. Aghacy (*ibid.*: 6) contends that the history of defeats in successive wars in the Levant shook men's self-perception and self-confidence in their dominant role in society.

I learnt about the persistent presence of war in a conversation about growing up in Syria with Mu'ayad and Laith. Both of them grew up in a village close to the Syrian border with Israel, and they described how they constantly felt that there was an external threat to their country. Laith, an engineer in his early thirties, who had fled to Lebanon before coming to Egypt, told me that the conflict with Israel was used in his childhood to make him understand that he and his family could not be rich. He was told that all the extra income a Syrian accumulates should be devoted to the fight against Israel: "If you are poor you should be fine with that because we are in the state of war". Following his statement, war can be understood as an omnipresent and permanent national challenge and it was every citizen's responsibility to live their life accordingly, that is, to sacrifice livelihood and individuality, as well as material and financial means for the sake of winning the war.

The sheer number of stories I heard about the Syrian military illustrates the comprehensive impact and control that war and the consequent militarisation of the Syrian society had over the lives of Syrian men. 'Abd al-Rahman, for instance, remembered vividly the influence of the military on his everyday life as a child in Syria.

"We were raised up in Syria in a Ba'athi childhood and the party's childhood (*tufūla ba 'athiyya wa tufūla hizbiyya*). They were always saying that we are in the first line of defence (*al-khat al-dafā'a al-awal*) against the Israeli enemy. Therefore, the student was always wearing the brown uniform (*al-maryūl*), which has the colour of the soil (*al-turāb*) so that the child grows up with a military appearance. However, there is something wrong according to the humanitarian principles. If I am between five and ten years old, I am still a child. I don't understand what a weapon is. I don't understand the meaning of war. However, the mentality of the Syrian regime was the mentality of the Ba'ath party, which

focuses on the topics of militarisation and carrying weapons in order to confront the Zionist enemy or the Israeli enemy. And this is nonsense to start with, because for forty years the Syrian Golan has been occupied by the Israelis and not a single bullet was fired”.

From his narrative, themes like constant indoctrination and militarisation from an early age onwards emerge, causing mental overload.

Perthes (2000: 154) stresses that much of the Syrian society was militarised due to the regime’s aim to incorporate all active parts of society into the security apparatus and engage in the “militaristic socialization” of the younger generations. Students in intermediate level and in high school had to wear uniforms in the style of the army. From primary school to university, Syrian students were taught militaristic values. In addition, the military organised mandatory training programmes for students from high school and university, and students who participated in special combat courses could obtain preferential university acceptance (*ibid.*: 155). Furthermore, Jones (2006) suggests that militarised masculinity is inherently extremist, “with a momentum that rapidly pushes it beyond the bound of what would be considered ‘acceptable’ behaviour in societies technically at peace” (*ibid.*: 454). In a similar vein, Lorraine Macmillan (2011: 63) argues that militarisation does not only mean teaching someone physical skills to participate in war, but to also normalise violence and acquire a disposition to accept killing. Enloe (1993: 68 cited in Giles 1999: 89) claims that militarisation does not only appear in ‘war zones’, nor is it static or and always similarly shaped; instead, militarisation informs gender relations in various ways in multiple locations, from factories, to police stations and bedrooms. ‘Abd al-Rahman’s critique of a child who must carry arms in the military camps targets exactly this extremism, the omnipresence of militarisation and the imposition of a certain radical mindset inherent in militarised masculinity. In a similar vein, Abū Walīd came to talk about the military camps he had to attend when growing up:

“Since we were children in the elementary school, there was a camp called ‘The children of Baath’ (*ma ‘askar al-talā’*) ‘a). [...] There, they are shouting (*yunādū*) slogans saying that the president shall live forever. In the intermediate school there is another camp, which is called ‘The youth of Baath’ (*ma ‘askar al-shabība*). You will find a guy who is fifteen or sixteen years old and they bring him to the camp and teach him how to use a gun. It is almost like the system in

the army. He is shouting in the same way for the life of the leader. This is what we learned”.

Again, themes like the interconnection of state propaganda and military, and the militaristic upbringing from a young age are described. Abū Walīd’s words illustrate how the regime manoeuvred children through the process of militarisation

In addition to discussing their militarised past with Syrian men, I often asked them for their views on the Syrian army, which, according to Perthes (2000: 155), can be described as the strongest instrument of the Syrian state, since it enabled the regime to monopolise the means of organised violence. Sluglett (2016: 42) writes that the Syrian armed forces were generally perceived as vital to the defence of the country because of Syria’s position as a ‘front-line state’ in the Arab-Israeli conflict and due to its involvement in the Lebanese civil war. He goes as far as arguing that, over time, the military’s main task became to defend the regime from the people. Bashār describes his ambivalent emotions towards the army:

“At the beginning of the revolution (*thawra*), the people had high hopes in the army. They were chanting: ‘*al-sh‘ab wa al-jaysh yid wāhda!*’ (The people and the army are united). The army represent the sons of the homeland. Maybe my friend or my cousin are in the army, or anyone else. You find people from many different ages, so the army represents all of our country. At the beginning the army was with the people but the problem is that there are people in high positions in the army but actually they are not in control. So, the army started to apply their orders. At that time, the army started to lose the support of the people. For each action, you will have a reaction. When the army applied violence, it received the same reaction”.

Bashār’s statement illustrates a sense of unity and a connection among Syrians from every part of the country, which resonates with an argument put forward by Perthes (2000: 157), who contends that the militarisation of Syrian society helped to create a spirit of Syrianness beyond loyalty to regional and subnational groups. Instead, the new spirit was related to the Syrian post-independence borders.

Overall, I contend that Syrian men describe their lives as being to a large extent militarised and that their memories and experiences are intertwined with, and informed by, a militaristic upbringing. The statements contain the expression of the inevitability of escaping the militarising campaigns and efforts of the regime and show that these measures were successful in teaching citizens their position in the societal hierarchy.

Furthermore, several Syrian men expressed a sense of disbelief and resentment that even children and adolescents were exposed to weapons, a high level of state propaganda and cult around the president. I also detected shock and cynicism about the use of lies to prepare young people to loyally defend their country. Moreover, these men's memories illustrate again the powerlessness of the individual vis-à-vis the authoritarian state: the state enforced militarised education, defined the dominant understanding of masculinity with regards to weapons and the military, and the individual was left with no choice but to obey.

### ***Serving in the Syrian army***

According to Kronsell and Svedberg (2012: 17), the military in most states is at the core of state formation and discourses of nationalism, and thus military practice and national identity formation are closely connected. Massad (2001: 100) defines the military as an identity-establishing institution within the nation state, which defines the 'national culture' as well as those who are part of the nation. Furthermore, the military, and especially conscription, plays an important role in shaping images in the larger society of how a man ought to be (Barrett 1996: 129). This is proven by the fact that military service is often described as a 'rite of passage' that has the power to turn adolescent boys into adult men (see Carreiras 2006: 41; Haugbolle 2012: 120; Klein 1999; Kandiyoti 1994: 208). According to Sune Haugbolle (2012: 120), military service is frequently equated with a path to national awareness and purposefulness and is defined as a way to protect the nation, subordinate women and other men. Islamologist Achim Rohde (2006: 189) argues that, through their uniform, soldiers signify that they sacrifice their private self for the good of the public and national identity. They enjoy high social prestige as the defenders of the national will. Moreover, military service utilises emotional control, overt heterosexual desire, and self-discipline as resources for the construction of hegemonic masculinity. There are also material benefits, such as economic security, that bring a conscript or a soldier closer to the role of the ideal man (Hinojosa 2010: 180).

Military service in Syria is mandatory for men and lasts more than two years, unless the young man is the family's only son, is incapable of serving in the army due to health issues, or had enough money to purchase an exemption. Studying at university or college also means an automatic postponement (Davis 2016: 51). Military service had a very bad reputation and only through payments to the officers was it possible to change

the location, treatment, tasks of the conscripts and to ensure a better quality and quantity of food (Rabo 2005: 152). Avoiding military service was not a solution. Young men who had not completed their military service had, for instance, extreme difficulty obtaining a passport (*ibid.*: 197). Despite its bad reputation, Rabo (2012: 83) argues that institutions like mandatory military service nevertheless assisted in creating the Syrian people out of a heterogeneous population.

Rochelle Davis (2016: 51) defines conscription “as not a huge issue of concern for most Syrian men”. Contrary to her view, I came to the conclusion that it actually was an issue of concern for most Syrian men I met in Egypt for various reasons, such as the feeling of having wasted a significant amount of their lives, or of being obstructed in their personal development. While disagreeing with Davis’ statement, I do not mean to argue that conscription was a marker of adult manhood and hegemonic masculinity in the specific context of Syria. Instead, I aim to illustrate that the perception of conscription and the military among my interlocutors was highly ambivalent, but mostly connoted with negative feelings. Ihāb, for instance, a young, unmarried man working as a construction worker, had left school when he was twelve years old because he felt that he could not learn anything there and would only receive punishment and beatings, so instead started working. He said the following with regards to the army: “All the people were escaping from the army because in the army you feel like a slave. No one liked to go. Everyone wanted to escape from the army”.

While Ihāb had not done his military service, Firās told me proudly that he did his military service by managing to complete it in the position of the “*sukhra* (service boy) for the colonels”. He described the service as two-and-a-half years of his life, which he lost “making tea and coffee”. In a later conversation with Maḥmūd, who set me in contact with Firās and was present during our meeting, he shared with me his surprise about Firās’ feeling of pride to have been a service boy in the army. Maḥmūd told me that Syrians living outside of Damascus looked down upon being a *sukhra* during military service. They preferred suffering regular military service to being in the service of the officers. According to Maḥmūd, being a *sukhra* could be equated with being a slave and with being available to give the officers sexual services. Since Firās was obviously proud of having found an easy way to survive his military service, this could only mean, Maḥmūd assumed, that Firās was rich enough to pay for being treated respectfully despite being in the position of the *sukhra*.

This incident shows, as did most aspects of the lives of the Syrian men I met, that success and respect during military service were defined by one's wealth and social status. The importance of wealth and background suggests that military masculinity is in many cases a class-specific aspiration predominantly related to working-class men. And indeed, Perthes (2000: 155) argues that in Syria, it was specifically appealing for young, uneducated villagers to be in the army, since the army represented a chance to leave rural life behind and pursue a career. For them, military service was frequently the only chance to receive a professional training. Following the connection of military masculinity with working-classness and rural background, Syrian men I met who were critical of the army proved to come from a class background, in which it was not necessary to pursue a career in the military to demonstrate their masculinity. Obviously, other routes to achieving respectable masculinity were available to these men.

While Firās did his military service in the early 2000s, Abū Māzin, who was in his sixties, told me that he did his military service during the war with Israel in 1973. He described his experiences in the army in the following way:

“We learned in the army to follow a system and we did sports activities. There were sports as you can see them on TV. So, we played sports plus we had exercises with the weapons. [...] For us, the army was an obstacle that stopped the young people, a big obstacle. I mean the person who didn't go to the army cannot do anything. He cannot study or work in a good way. As I told you, the army is an obstacle especially for men”.

Abū Māzin also mentioned that the army was “destroyed” (*mudmir*) by Hafiz al-Assad because he turned it into a “sectarian place” (*makān tā'ifī*) with the Alawites dominating soldiers from all other religious groups. It is acknowledged by several academics that recruitment and promotions in the army predominantly favoured Alawites, and thus Alawites occupied most of the dominant positions (see Sluglett 2016; Trombetta 2014: 29). This means that in addition to class and family background, one's sectarian affiliation defined one's experience in the military.

In a similar vein, Abū Walīd remembered the privileged treatment that Alawites enjoyed in the army based solely on their sectarian background:

“I went to the army as a normal soldier, but in order to relax in the army you should pay the colonel. All the colonels are Alawites. The Alawi sect is the sect of the president. My place in the army was at the Syrian-Iraqi border next to Deir ez-Zor. In order to relax and go to Damascus I used to pay a lot, 10.000 Syrian

Lira. It was written that I wasn't a normal soldier, but a driver; however, I actually didn't drive for them. I just paid 10.000 SL and I could go to Damascus. The army is corrupt. With money, everything works. If a soldier cannot pay he will stay in the barracks and nothing will reach him. Even if the family sends him something, it won't reach him, because the colonels will steal it. The soldier has a salary that is not higher than ten dollars a month. The Shia and Alawi soldiers are spoiled. The regime treats them well. They get permission for holidays".

As mentioned in the previous chapters, bribe paying and corruption, just as differing treatment based on sectarianism, infiltrated every part of life in Syria and even in Egypt. In the context of the military service, bribes were needed if one wanted to guarantee a conscript's food supply and good treatment (Rabo 2005: 153). In addition to the presence of sectarian hierarchies, Abū Walīd describes a certain form of vulnerability derived from being at the mercy of the officers' ill will among conscripts that is also recognised by Deniz Kandiyoti (1994: 206). She defines this sentiment as "the utter helplessness in the face of total, arbitrary authority, where each man will have been controlled by the whims of another man". In the context of Syria, this helplessness and enforced acceptance of hierarchies are intertwined with sectarianism and a corrupt, totalitarian system and thus affect men in the army differently depending on their social status.

Akram, the primary school teacher who fled to Egypt because he did not want to do military service, described how the conscription transformed into a choice between life and potential death after the uprising in 2011.

"We had something that we called military service. However, if we go and do the military service we will probably die, maybe by the hands of the people who are fighting the army or by people, whom we refuse to collaborate with. [...] They started to take the young people from the checkpoints. They stopped you and asked you to show your ID. For example, you are travelling and they stop you and they see your name. Then, they tell you: 'please come with us!'. Then, they obligate you to go to the military service and they accuse you because you didn't want to do the military service in the first place. With all this trouble and horrible things, we used to say that we live but we live like animals that only survive to eat. The animals just eat and sleep and follow their desires, but enjoying life and being happy – no!".

It is worth noting that Akram, just like Yāsmīn, when describing poverty and corruption in Syria, compared the situation back in Syria to the life of animals, reduced to basic

instincts and survival. Yāsmīn defined corruption, poverty, the regime's indifference and the malaise of the system as an environment in which the individual lives and feels like an animal. What made Akram feel like an animal was the inability to refuse to follow what the dictatorial system expected of him.

I suggest that military service was neither appreciated nor used as a tool to acquire resources to achieve hegemonic masculinity. Rather, military service is remembered as a time of humiliation, unfair favouritism based on sectarian belonging, and as an obstacle to one's personal development.

### ***Being young, male and vulnerable***

Anthropologist Stephen Lubkemann (2008: 19) writes that movement is not the only choice for people who are refugees. They could have also opted to stay and engage in active fighting, passive resistance or accommodation to new regimes. He emphasises that decisions to stay or flee are not self-evident and need to be scrutinised and discussed "in the light of the multidimensional concerns of socially and culturally situated actors" (ibid.: 20). Moreover, he states that in the context of the Mozambican civil war, war-time movement was motivated by the culturally imagined life projects of inhabitants of the war zone (ibid.: 21). Proceeding from his argument that forced migration during civil war is not self-evident, I analyse why Syrian men left their home country and decided not to take up arms.

Most of the men I met in Cairo fled Syria between 2011 and early 2013. Most had experienced the regime's violent response to peaceful demonstrations, harsh crackdowns in their neighbourhoods and arbitrary arrests. Several families I met identified their concerns about young male family members as the main reason for their flight. I was told that young men were in danger of being recruited into al-Assad's army, arrested, kidnapped or killed. Hence, they were urged to leave the country and often their families accompanied them or joined them shortly after. Al-Ali and Pratt (2009: 12) point out that men and women suffer during war and conflict in gender-specific ways. Since men often remain in the position of decision-makers, politicians, soldiers, etc., certain types of men, such as soldiers, are vulnerable. According to Jones (2006: 452), the most vulnerable and constantly targeted population group in situations of war is non-combatant men of 'battle age', since they are perceived as a threat to the conquering force. This group is also most likely to have the repressive apparatus of the state directed against them. Mikdashi (2014),

who examines Israel's war on Gaza, contends that the Palestinian male is perceived as "always already dangerous" in contrast to the undistinguishable group of women and children, who are dealt with as civilians. She goes on to say that boys and men are judged, according to what they might do to the militaries that occupy their country or to the 'actual' civilians. It is thus challenging, she stresses, to designate the status of 'civilian' to the male Palestinian.

Analysing the situation of young men in Syria, Davis et al. (2014: 35) declare that men, even if they do not carry weapons, are assumed at the very least to be willing to fight and are consequently viewed either as an asset or as a threat to the regime or the opposition movement. Since the conflict began, even men who have already completed their military service have been called up to serve again until the age of forty-two (*ibid.*). While it used to be possible to pay 7,500 US Dollars to be exempted from service, the regime raised the fee to 15,000 US Dollars in 2013. Since 2012, it is not only men who have not completed their military service who are banned from leaving Syria, but all men between the ages of eighteen and forty-two are prohibited from travelling without prior authorisation (*ibid.*: 36). It thus became almost impossible for men of fighting age to avoid serving in the army or to leave the country.

In the following section, I present several narratives I collected among young Syrian men in Cairo that illustrate the fear of their families, and the authority parents used to urge their sons to flee. Hānī shared with me that he was told by his father to leave Syria when the army was about to enter his hometown. His brothers were also told to escape to Turkey because his father feared they would be arrested. 'Abd al-Rahman experienced a similar situation. He recalled having breakfast with his family on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2011 "and I told my father that I would join the revolution once it starts and he said to me 'You shouldn't stay in Syria. You must leave Syria because you talk a lot'. I had to leave and continue my studies". Both Hānī and 'Abd al-Rahman were impelled by their fathers to leave Syria because of their gender and in 'Abd al-Rahman's case because of his talkative character. His father ignored his wish to stay and join the revolution and instead urged him to escape from Syria against his will.

Ghassān described his family's decision to leave Syria in the following way.

MS: Who made the decision to leave Syria?

Ghassān: "My parents. The reason was their concern for their sons. We lived in an area that was not very safe. My uncle had some problems. They arrested him

in this area. There were some people who brought the security service to my cousins only to arrest them as well”.

The overriding worry about male family members of fighting age was fuelled when Ghassān’s family witnessed the arrest of male relatives, and was hence the main motive for his family to leave Syria. In Ghassān’s account it is obvious that young men were in danger due to their gender and age. There was no room for discussion, it seems, and all three young men eventually deferred to their family’s wishes.

Fādī was similarly forced by his family because of the rising danger of young men being seen in the demonstrations in Syria.

Magdalena: Why did you decide to leave Syria at that particular point in time?

Fādī: The son of an officer of the *mukhābarāt* saw me in a demonstration. He threatened me by saying that he would tell his father that he saw me, but we managed to solve the problem. [...] My father was mad because demonstrating was dangerous and he didn’t want me to be in danger.

[...]

Magdalena: how was the first day in Egypt for you?

Fādī: I was shocked. I didn’t want to leave my country but my father forced me to go with the family. I couldn’t believe that I had left my country. I was so sad. [...] I should be in Syria. I should defend my country. I should not have left. I have nothing to lose. I believe in heaven. Heaven is better than life here. However, the family made me stay [in Egypt].

Fādī described how he opposed his family’s wish to leave Syria. However, just like ‘Abd al-Rahmān, Ghassān and Hānī, he eventually accepted his family’s decision.

The following narratives from mothers with adolescent sons reinforce a predominant attitude of the parents making decisions based on their sons’ gender and age. Um Marwān, a mother of two adolescent boys, remembered the moment when the fleeing family was stopped at the Syrian border because the border guards were suspicious of her younger son’s age. Um Marwān told the soldiers at the border that her son was only seventeen-and-a-half years old and consequently he had six more months before he had to present himself available for the military service. Before she and her family left Syria, she had made sure that her older son, who had just finished his military service, escaped, since she was extremely worried that he would be recruited. When I first met Um Marwān, her sons were already in Sweden, and she was proud of how they were doing

and was relieved to know that they were safe. She showed me videos on her mobile and called her sons via Skype to talk to me. In a similar vein to Um Marwān, Um Bāssim, whom I introduced earlier as a woman with three children who had become the main provider of the household after her husband had lost all his savings and could not work anymore, decided that her eldest son had to leave Syria immediately when the revolution broke out. He had had an accident before the beginning of the uprising and both his legs were broken. Um Bāssim was worried that the regime would suspect that he had participated in the demonstrations and had been injured there. She thus sent him to a relative living in Cairo. When her son wanted to come back after seven months, she did not allow him to return because she still feared he could be arrested.

During these conversations, I observed that female family members were not the object of these worries or among the main reasons why families and individuals left their home country. I assume that female family members were perceived as less vulnerable because of the traditional assumptions that Syrian women are more likely to spend time at home and are thus not in the direct scope of the Syrian regime. Furthermore, authoritarian regimes have often defined young men as a particular danger to their rule due to their energy, youth and visible presence in public (see for example Ismail 2006).

Not only do these women's memories prove young men's exceptional vulnerability in Syria, they also show the obvious and unconditional love and care for each other and the cohesion of the nuclear family. What reverberates from all the accounts and statements is that decisions are not made individually but rather in a "connective" and "relational" (Joseph 1994: 55) way proving "the primacy of the family over the person and society" (*ibid.*: 56). The theme of ultimate love and care for the family has been discussed already in previous chapters and should be understood as a defining marker of Syrian men and women's lives, relationships, decisions, and understandings of gender roles.

It is important to note that even though I collected several accounts in which parents were described as the main decision-makers and the ones who pushed their sons to leave Syria, this experience cannot be applied throughout. Mu'ayad, for instance, was shot in Syria while protesting in the first days of the revolution and when the wound did not heal, he decided to leave Syria for Egypt. In Syria, he could not get medical help, he told me, since the secret service was checking hospitals for patients with bullet wounds, which they took as proof of their participation in demonstrations. Patients with bullet wounds had to fear arrest and death, Mu'ayad said. He also knew that a bullet wound in

a young man's body would not only put him in danger, but would also be a safety risk for his family and friends. The longer he stayed in Syria and was hiding in different places, the more people knew about him and his injury, and the clearer it became that, sooner or later, his family and the people who offered him shelter would get into trouble with the regime. Hence, Mu'ayad decided to leave Syria. He did not tell his family that he was planning to escape to Egypt, but only informed them that he would stay in Damascus until his wound healed. His decision to leave Syria was described to me as an act of sacrifice for the sake and safety of his family.

Mu'ayad, like the other young men who were urged to leave Syria, had wanted to change something in his country. They had wanted to participate in demonstrations, to inform the world through videos and pictures about what was going on in Syria, and they had wanted to press for changes. However, they were powerless apropos the omnipresent, all-knowing and violent state, and for the sake of their families and their own lives, they accepted the state's superiority and their own powerlessness and left Syria.

### *Experiencing the Syrian uprising*

Carolyn Nordstrom (2004: 59) asks in her ground-breaking ethnography on war and violence: "And how does violence feel?" suggesting that it feels like hopelessness, loss of future and existential crisis. She argues that death and violence change in their meaning: they become sentiments rather than mere facts (*ibid.*). In an attempt to answer her question, this paragraph discusses how violence and death felt to the Syrian men I met in Cairo.

The uprising changed Syrian men's lives in various ways. Most of them described a change in their emotional state and a new perspective on life due to the uprising and their life in exile. Akram, for instance, who fled Syria with his father in 2012, described a long-lasting and previously unknown encounter with fear and anxiety.

"During the last two years in Syria I was afraid of sleeping and waking up only to find someone arresting me and taking me to I don't know where. Maybe a bomb or a missile will fall on me and kill me. This fear put a heavy weight on our shoulders. When I arrived in Egypt and I heard any fireworks I was afraid. I thought that there were bombs and attacks. [...] Even if we are young people and we have a big capacity to stand these situations we really became exhausted. It took me the whole first year to forget all these noises of bombs and explosions.

When I see certain types of cars I still get scared. When I see a pickup, I get afraid because the army used these cars. There were many things that I used to get afraid of'.

Akram felt that he was supposed to tolerate and endure fear easily. However, he had to realise the burden of constant insecurity, distress and anxiety that he describes as a feeling of being pulled down by a weight put on his shoulders. Anxiety haunts him and occurs unexpectedly in his daily life in Egypt. This echoes what Das (2007: 9) discusses in the context of fear and the everyday in India. She describes a “temporality of anticipation” (*ibid.*) defined through one’s loss of trust in the social context one used to know. Fear is constantly present and is not the fear of the unknown but fear of what one has already encountered. Akram’s description of his emotional state also resonates with the investigation of war and trauma by Yolanda Gampel (2000: 50), in which she argues that the confrontation with an “unreal reality” that is incompatible with anything experienced before creates an overwhelming feeling of “uncanniness”, anxiety of one’s imagination and a loss of trust in one’s senses. The pain and terror of war cause the destruction of the individual’s capacity for perception, its representation and symbolisation (*ibid.*: 55).

Likewise, Jackson (2002: 46/47) provides a frame for Akram’s narrative: he is interested in deconstructing the abstract term ‘fear’ when analysing stories told by men who had fought in the Second World War. He argues that the metaphors used by the soldiers to describe their fear related, on the one hand, to the helplessness they felt when they were unable to change their external situations, and on the other hand, fear was expressed because of their immediate, subjective inability to control their body and inner emotions. For Akram, fear equates with feelings of powerlessness to change his fate, passivity and the feeling of being haunted by memories and uncontrollable physical reactions.

Rāfi, similarly, felt that the uprising had confronted him with so far unknown and unimaginable stages of anxiety. He remembered how he was once hiding with his three small children in the bathroom fearing for their lives. Neither his children nor he himself, he told me, could forget up until that moment the noises of the war they heard outside. Rāfi left for Egypt with his family to guarantee his children’s safety. In Egypt, when people asked him why he had left his country he unusually answered that the situation in Syria was unbearable, and unimaginable for others.

In contrast to Akram and Rāfi, who described their hitherto unknown experiences of anxiety, Ihāb, who came to Egypt in 2012, referred to a loss of emotions and deadening of his feelings.

“The bad thing is that I lost feelings. Even if I hear a lot that my friends died or that my relatives died I don’t have any feelings. The feelings died and this is the bad thing. In Syria, when someone died, we cried for him, but now it became normal and we don’t cry anymore. We got used to it. In Syria, bombs flew over your head and there were bullets in the air, but now it’s normal. We became used to it. The violence planted in us toughness. There are no more tears and nothing else”.

Ihāb finds no emotions or tears in himself to mourn the multiple deaths of loved ones around him. There is nothing in him that can respond to the catastrophe he experiences. According to Jackson (2002: 92), arbitrary and untimely death “can neither be construed as the consummation of a journey nor the conclusion of a story”. In this case, he contends, death occurs as a fact without significance. With Jackson’s narrative in mind, I suggest that the inability to make sense of the arbitrary and unexplainable death around him transformed Ihāb’s emotions and evoked a feeling of incomprehension, emptiness and normalisation.

Doug Henry (2009: 119) refers to Carina Perelli’s term “blood memories” to describe a situation in which “life becomes broken into a before and after of discontinuities and disruptions”. Consciousness loses the social rationality and normality as well as the referents, identities and social conventions once taken for granted. Andreas Bandak (2015: 672), who analyses Syrian Christians’ fears, anxieties and horrors at the beginning of the uprising, argues that the Syrian conflict opened a space of death through “diverse forms of actual dying of individuals, as the symbolic dismemberment of a society, and as concrete and imagined fears of extinction, religious persecution and of becoming refugees”. Even though one wants to cling to what has been known “one is forced away by a storm too strong to resist” (*ibid.*: 684).

Regarding his engagement with the Syrian uprising in exile, Hānī mentioned his ambivalent reactions to and handling of information he received from Syria.

“I am here for three years now and my soul is completely destroyed. I am very influenced by what’s happening in Syria. Sometimes one or two months pass and I don’t care about the news. I am not following the news. Sometimes they bombard the areas where my family and friends stay and I don’t know about it.

The areas of some of my relatives in the countryside were bombarded and I didn't know about it. It is a negative thing. Also, my friends here in Egypt, who have families in Syria, do not follow the news anymore like they used to before".

Hānī not only describes being unable to follow the news but also a consciously applied strategy on his part and that of his friends not to know and be aware of the dramatic developments in Syria in order to endure daily life in Egypt. It appears as if this decision serves as a coping mechanism and helps Hānī to survive in Egypt, but it also shows a strong sense of depression, anxiety and a consequent conscious deadening of his emotions.

According to sociologist Victor Seidler (2011: 392), who studies forms of masculinity in the West in the context of the holocaust and its survivors, if masculinity is constructed through a negation of everything feminine, it is not easy to acknowledge feelings of sadness, vulnerability and fear, since such emotions are predominantly considered to be feminine. He argues that dominant European heterosexual masculinities have suppressed loss and traumatic events of the past (*ibid.*: 389) and thus emotions of sadness and anxiety become transformed into the anger or violence that sustains male identities. He further asserts that masculinities are often identified with self-control, control of emotions and of desires that can distract one from pursuing one's life goals (*ibid.*: 396). By ignoring particular layers of painful experiences, men attempt to retain the image of masculinity that others expect them to perform (*ibid.*: 397). Based on Seidler's argument, I suggest that in order to pursue his life and retain a masculine image, Hānī tried to control his emotions by rejecting a daily engagement with the war in Syria. It appears as if he aimed to avoid unknown, irrepressible and overwhelming emotions being triggered (*ibid.*: 336). I observed this coping mechanism as well among Syrian friends who had left Egypt for Germany and still had family back in Syria. A conscious confrontation with the daily news from Syria would have left them heartbroken and unable to continue with their daily routines. That meant that conversations with them were sometimes abruptly interrupted by them as soon as they turned to the news from Syria.

Likewise, Māzin, a student of dentistry, who arrived in Egypt in 2011 on his own before his parents joined him in Egypt several months later, described the painful situation of not knowing whether his family back in Syria was safe and the consequent emotional turmoil he felt.

“The first month was chaotic and during the first five months I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. Will I leave? Will I continue with my studies in Egypt? Will I go back to Syria? Will I stay? The situation was confusing and difficult. Many times, we didn’t have connection to our families in Syria. And we are here and hear that there are problems, bombs and attacks in our areas but couldn’t contact our families. The first five months were really very difficult but *al-hamdu lillah* (thanks God) at the end it worked out”.

In Māzin’s account, one senses not only the emotional distress of not knowing whether one’s family is well, but also the struggle of liminality. Refugeehood can be described in Victor Turner’s (1967: 93) words as a liminal phase of being “betwixt and between” and of being in an “interstructural situation”. Simon Turner (1999: 7), who analysed the situation of young Burundian men in a Tanzanian refugee camp, used this definition and extended it by declaring that “refugees are neither here nor there, neither this nor that, they cannot be classified as boys or men”. It is a phase of complete insecurity, instability, perplexity and precarity. All the aspects that, according to Turner, mark refugeehood are painfully present in Māzin’s narrative, when he questions his decisions and expresses severe doubts about his present and future.

Both Hānī and Māzin also shared with me the changes they observed in their approach to life since the outbreak of the uprising and their consequent flight. Hānī compared the ideas he had had before the outbreak of the revolution and his current attitude to life.

“The events changed many things. It changed my mentality, my way of thinking. I learned more about life. Life taught me many things. When we were in Syria we were thinking in an easy way about life. But really, life is difficult and it needs effort. Life became difficult and the Syrian starts to compare death with death in order to find a country where he can live a good life. We thought about a good job, a car, a house, a nice position in the social class background in Syria. I remember that a long time ago there was hardly anyone who went by the sea to Europe, but now there are many. [...] These people risk their lives. They either die or arrive”.

The uprising taught Hānī to see the hardship in life and to assume responsibility rather than to take life easily. Life after the revolution is defined as full of dilemmas, dangers and devastation and people’s decision to risk their lives to live in safety is generated out of this condition. People’s options are confined and limited to a choice between two paths

and at the end of both paths lies potential death. Likewise, Māzin describes the uprising and its consequences for his life as a lesson for him to act responsibly and have a mature outlook on life.

“I think that I grew up faster. I feel that I am more mature and more responsible here. When I left Syria, I was 21 years old and now I am 25 years old. I grew older and understand more now. When I graduated, I started to think about what I should do. At the end of Ramadan in 2011 two of my friends died as martyrs. The first one died on the first day of Ramadan, the second one died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan. They were living in the same house. They died in the demonstrations. I was here in Egypt. Now, I am older and I understand more. In Syria, I never thought about all these things. My life was normal. I thought about having a job, a house, a family, but now it is different. Here I think about my future, my situation, my family, where I should go and what I should do”.

Māzin defines his experience of hardship during the uprising as a transition to maturity. Knowledge, experiencing the death of loved ones, confronting worries and attempting to make sense of an uncertain future are the characteristics that have made him more mature and sensible and have a deeper understanding. It is significant that Māzin juxtaposes his absence from the conflict in Syria and his friends’ death in his narrative. I suggest that his consciousness of this contrast added another layer of maturity and an urge to make something meaningful out of his life. And indeed, Māzin not only talked about responsibility and maturity but also acted accordingly. In the late summer of 2015, he decided to travel via Turkey to Germany after he had been trying to obtain a visa at the German embassy in Egypt since 2015. Knowing that his elderly parents depended on him, he took them with him on his two-week long journey to Germany where he currently attends language courses in order to be able to work in his profession as a dentist to provide for himself, his parents and his new wife.

For ‘Abd al-Rahman and Abū Walīd, the arrival in Egypt, the inability to (continue to) engage in the Syrian uprising and do anything for their family and friends back in Syria, and the feeling of powerlessness translated into actions and activism in Egypt. ‘Abd al-Rahman described the devastating helplessness he felt when he could not reach out to his family back in Syria.

“They were writing about heavy bombing in [his hometown] and about dozens of people who got killed there. My family was still there and there was no communication so I couldn’t check on them. I always imagined when I hear

bombing that it was raining bombs and bullets from the sky and all I thought about was death and blood. We decided here in Egypt that we should make a stand to show to the world what was going on in Syria and that it was wrong. We contacted our friends and we arranged the stand in front of the embassy. We were attacked there. Many thugs came out of the embassy and attacked us. [...] The demonstrations in Syria took place in [his hometown]. I was angry because it was my home city and I couldn't control my anger and I started chanting: 'Down with the regime and down with Bashar al-Assad!'. This might have been the first time I said it in public".

'Abd al-Rahman described how the unfamiliar fright and rage he experienced, when demonstrations took place in his home city and he had no opportunity to participate in the protests or check on his family, transformed into new forms of bravery, courage and resistance. It was easy for him to become an activist because of his knowledge of Egypt, his long-term stay there, his network with other Syrians in Cairo, and his longstanding involvement in politics.

Likewise, Abū Walīd remembered that upon his arrival in Egypt, when his "psychological state wasn't good", he felt that he wanted to become active again and so contacted some people in Syria who put him in touch with activists in Egypt involved in support of the opposition.

"I wanted to participate in something. I talked to some people in Syria and they said that there were some people in Egypt. [...] I went out of a place where there was a revolution so I should continue with the same work that I used to do. So, I talked to some people and the line of Egypt, Libya and Turkey was working. There were money transfers taking place. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood was in power in Libya, Egypt and Turkey these things weren't official. They left for us things to do in secret, like using bank accounts of someone. When Morsi fell and al-Sisi came to power the security service stopped these things because they knew, who was helping in this situation".

Abū Walīd had been involved, with his family and friends, in the revolution in Syria from its beginning through voluntary support in weapon transfers before he had to flee due to his activism and consequently felt that he could not give up his activism for the uprising after having fled.

The various ways in which the experiences of the uprising had an ongoing effect on Syrian men's lives as refugees in Egypt call for an analysis of masculinity which is

sensitive to emotions, vulnerabilities and memories that have ingrained themselves in these men and have become a marker of their self. Being a man and refugee, who fled civil war and violence, involved dealing with traumatising experiences that had a lasting effect on the self and included incorporating and accepting them. Among the men I met, memories of the civil war determined differing actions and motivated various decisions: from complete refusal to know to angry activism; from a deadening of feelings to uncontrollable fear. Consequently, I suggest understanding masculinity as elastic and tensile. Being a man meant to reconstruct the self around unknown emotions and to create an acceptable version of manhood that could exist alongside their traumatising memories.

### ***Choosing not to defend the home country***

On one occasion, I talked to the aunt of an Egyptian friend of mine. I had known her and her family for a while and she knew about my research. She asked me why Syrian men came to Egypt instead of staying in Syria and defending their country. She said that she could not understand why Syrian men escaped from their country leaving the stage open for the regime and ISIS.

When I asked Syrian men I met what importance they ascribed to staying in Syria in order to take up arms, an answer I received regularly was that they did not see any sense in fighting. They were against carrying weapons, violence, bloodshed and killing. Ihāb, for instance, informed me that being armed was not common among Syrians in their everyday life before the uprising. If someone carried a gun, it marked him as influential, dominant and powerful, connected to the regime and, for this reason, above the law.

- Magdalena: Were weapons normal in Syria?
- Ihāb: No, weapons were forbidden. It's not like here in Upper Egypt. In Syria, it's prohibited. No one can carry them. It's even forbidden to have a knife. If someone fights with a knife, he will be imprisoned for seven months.
- Magdalena: So, it wasn't normal at all?
- Ihāb: No, not at all. A person who carries a weapon is either supported through *wasta* or is an official in the government.

Based on Ihāb's description and several other critical statements regarding weapons, I understand that being armed was not a signifier of every' man's masculinity in pre-war Syria, but rather a display of a certain powerful position within Syrian society that only a few men held. And thus, it comes as no surprise that Hānī argued that he had no

knowledge of weapons or about killing someone. He said that he was not raised this way and for this reason it did not occur to him to participate in the fighting in Syria. His friend Bashār, who was present during our conversation, supported his opinion, arguing that in Syria the majority of men neither carried nor used weapons:

“There are some people who want to go back [to Syria] to carry weapons. However, carrying guns can bring a disaster. Really, in Syria we were not used to the culture of guns. We were like a civil country and most of us were civilians. No one was thinking about having guns. And also the regime considered having guns a big thing. When we started the revolution, it was peaceful. Then with time having guns was like a reaction. The people who brought the weapons to the revolution stayed, the ones, who didn’t use weapons, left. The problem is that the people started to get used to the life with guns. With time, it started to become normal. Now the people who have guns are showing off. It’s like: ‘look, I have a gun!’”.

Bashār described a gradual normalisation of the use of weapons. In a society in which bearing arms was seemingly not common before the uprising, weapons have become a status symbol among the people who stayed in Syria.

Weapons are usually considered integral to the context of violence, war and militarisation and are furthermore frequently described as symbolising manhood (see Jaji 2009; Maringira et al. 2015; Sa’ar and Yahia-Younis 2008). Henri Myrttinen (2003: 37) states that carrying weapons is predominantly perceived as natural and as part of a particular notion of masculinity that equates manliness with the accepted and authorised use of violence. He writes that weapons are used as status symbols, as instruments to acquire economic and social advances, and as a way to apply power over unarmed men and women. Through the display of a weapon in public, a man displays his masculinity and his role in society (*ibid.*: 38). Jaji (2009: 181) argues that in a context of everyday violence, wearing a gun becomes an integral aspect of hegemonic masculinity, and men who flee from violence and from men who carry guns can only exist on the periphery of this masculinity. Consequently, it can be argued by echoing Jones (2006: 455) that the absence of arms during combat represents a profound failure and rejection of masculinity.

Akram, the primary school teacher, also refused to bear arms and fight because he could not reconcile killing with his morals and ethics.

“I was peaceful in the revolution. Like for any guy in Syria, it would have been possible for me to get weapons during the revolution, however, I used to refuse it

because of the issue of killing another person. No matter if he is my friend or my enemy I refuse to kill a person. Some people got used to it and started to kill others. My attitude is like the attitude of everyone, who is waiting for someone to give us back some kind of dignity”.

Based on his moral code that tells him not to kill, Akram chooses to be passive while Ihāb describes the feeling of disillusion and hopelessness when thinking about fighting.

“Who shall I defend? Both are fighting each other. This one is killing in the name of God and that other one is also killing in the name of God. With whom shall I side? He is killing and you are killing so whom will I support? And now there are even more groups that are killing each other and each one has its army. At the beginning, there was the FSA and the regime’s army only, but now you don’t know anymore. Now there are too many militant groups”.

Ihāb was not able to see the bigger cause for which the various groups in the Syrian war are fighting. None of the groups convince him and thus their actions can be boiled down to useless killings that make them all the same. He cannot find a position in this conflict for himself. I sensed a feeling of impotence and helplessness when he continued to explain who the beneficiaries of the revolution are.

“No, no one got benefits from the revolution. There are people who died and there are people who sold their property. Some people got benefits like thieves and the people who work in weapon trade and the big traders who are controlling the prices. These are people who don’t care if the FSA or the regime might get destroyed – they don’t care about these things, the ones who control the prices”.

Expressing the feeling of being utterly unimportant to those holding the reins in the Syrian civil war, Ihāb repeats Muḥannad’s opinion:

“In the first demonstration, I went out with my friend. [...] But now, after four years, I don’t know who I am with anymore. Frankly, no one cares for us. Everyone only wants his benefit. Now there are many groups. That’s why I somehow agree with the *ramādiyyīn* (neutrals). What will happen? What’s the end of this? At the beginning, I was hoping for a civilised society, civilised people, civilised leaders. Now we are refugees with all this destruction”.

What is prominent in Akram’s, Ihāb’s and Muḥannad’s opinions is the inability to find meaning and a position for themselves in this conflict. In contrast to the several young men who fought with their parents to be able to stay in Syria, these men retreat to the role of external observer. Likewise, Abū Muḥammad refrained from an active engagement.

He said: “I don’t want to be one of the people who are destroying the country by being on one side or the other”. Siding with one of the conflict parties equates for him with the destruction of his home country and thus he remains unsupportive of any group.

With several Syrian men expressing their scepticism about the civil war and participation in it, the connection between men, war and fighting being predominantly perceived as natural is challenged. According to Lynne Segal (2008: 30), men are self-evidently associated with the rhetoric of domination, the use of coercion, toughness, assertiveness, stoicism, obedience and heroism. Women are instead perceived to be more passive during war, and are attributed with roles, such as the caregiver to family members, the mourner for kin and the potential victim of war crimes (see Toivanen and Baser 2016: 299; Gentry 2009: 244). The importance of constructions of gender in the context of war is exemplified by Joseph Massad (2001: 208), who observes that the Jordanian military defeat was rhetorically equated with a defeat of masculinity. The shaming of the soldiers’ manhood became a way to mobilise them for war. Similarly, the feminisation of the enemy was used to activate the army. Massad’s observations confirm the argument of feminist international relations theorist Cynthia Enloe (2004: 108) that militarisation of ethnic nationalism depends on the individual, who needs to be convinced that his own manhood will be questioned if he does not perform as a soldier. She argued, by unveiling the link between masculinity and war, that this kind of socialisation predominantly requires artificial construction and sometimes coercion. She, among other feminists, called for the deconstruction of the victim category occupied by women and the categorisation of all men as militia fighters during war. She stressed that this dichotomy does not pay attention to men who are “marginalized, silenced, or injured” in times of conflict (*ibid.*: 104). Even if cultural ideals of femininity and masculinity reinforce a link between successful manhood and fighting, it does not mean that all men do take up arms all the time – instead, some might flee the country (*ibid.*: 108). Similarly, Cynthia Cockburn (2009: 163) describes the significant difference between representation and practice: while men are represented in a generalising and essentialising way to be courageous fighters, there are men in all wars who are frightened, reluctant to fight and unwilling to kill.

Rarely did I hear of men who returned to Syria in order to fight. A Syrian woman I met when I volunteered in an NGO told me that her son had recently completed his studies in Egypt and had just returned to Syria in order to fight with the FSA. She said that he was guided by the wish to fight for freedom and a new government. She also told me that he was initially against the use of weapons and that his original idea was to help

the people in Syria. When I took a short break from fieldwork to spend Christmas with my family, I met the brother of one of my Syrian students in Germany. ‘Abbās, who was in his early twenties, and whose arm was injured when he fought against the regime’s army, told me that he wished to go back to Syria to take up arms. He could not stand the fact that so many of his friends were dying in Syria while he was safe in Germany. While he used to tell me that he was injured during the demonstrations in Syria, the longer he knew me the more openly he talked to me culminating in his confession that he had lied to me at the beginning and that in fact he had been injured while fighting against the regime. ‘Abbās was convinced that Syrian men would be held accountable on the Day of Judgement for having left Syria. They would be punished, he assumed, for having fled while Syrian women were still and continuously being tortured in Syrian prisons. Since my first encounter with him he kept mentioning that he wanted to return to Syria to participate in the fighting. The only thing that seemed to stop him were his parents, who were still in Syria, begging him to stay in Germany, in safety.

While ‘Abbās described the ‘natural’ connection between fighting and manhood expecting punishment because of having fled from his responsibility to fight, the majority of my Syrian contacts in Egypt assumed a neutral or a refusing position. This distancing from any form of combat masculinity shows that, in the context of war, the use of violence remains merely one means of achieving masculinity among several other ones, rather than an integral component of manhood (Dolan 2003: 78). Nevertheless, choosing an alternative to combat masculinity includes an effort on the part of the men to explain themselves and justify their decisions. And thus, Syrian men presented several versions of acceptable manhood to me: the obedient family member, the educated pacifist and the informed observer who is unwilling to fight.

### ***Using weapons versus helping in a human way***

Carrying guns is predominantly understood in the literature to symbolise manhood, however, in Syria it identified the carrier as a beneficiary of the regime, as described by Ihāb. I recognised that many Syrians perceived the use of weapons as the main reason for the escalation of the conflict. Carrying and using weapons was predominantly perceived as having brought evil to Syria. Hence, weapons were not regarded as tools of protection or as markers of manhood among Syrian men I met, but indicated rather the opposite,

namely uproar, illegitimate possession and use of power, and a guarantee of conflicts. Hānī describes weapons as instruments that transform people into killers and destroyers.

“The people who participated in the revolution were educated people and they weren’t extremists. However, when the arms arrived many people took up arms even though they were still thinking about freedom and the goals of the revolution. They used arms but at the same time they continued thinking about all these goals”.

Hānī’s account implies that participants in the conflict radicalised and eventually used guns to press for their visions of a better Syria. This, however, was strongly rejected by many Syrian men I met. Abū Muḥammad said: “Starting with weapons and using bullets were the main reasons why the problems grew bigger. It was the wrong decision. You shouldn’t use weapons! You can use other ways to claim your rights and apply pressure”. There was not only a strong condemnation of the use of arms at the beginning of the uprising but also a strong sense of wishing to be able to be involved in the conflict without being forced to use weapons, as Abū Muḥammad explained to me:

“I had some money at that time and I told them: ‘I want to help in a human way; I want to help the old and the sick. I don’t want to give money to support the militias’. I refused it because if I paid for weapons the people would use them against each other. If a problem appears between the owner of the weapons and one of his friends, he will use the weapons and the government will not understand this. In such a situation, I would have helped in killing people but not in solving and helping. I personally want to participate in building Syria. I want to help humanity. I am not into the topic of weapons”.

Fādī, who felt forced to comply with his father’s wish to leave Syria even though he sought to stay to defend his country, laid out to me his vision of taking part in the conflict:

“I don’t want to be with the FSA. I want to fight to save other people’s lives and to defend others. It is not because I like to carry guns. I only want to fight to help people. I don’t want to fight innocent people. I would want to demonstrate in Syria and to volunteer in hospitals. I want to help people rather than killing them”.

Akram, Fādī and Abū Muḥammad display a pacifist attitude and the urge to engage in peaceful activism for their homeland. And thus, I argue that it was a strategy among Syrian men I met to articulate a non-aggressive masculinity. Assuming that statements like the one that asked why men would not stay in Syria to fight, did not only reach me but also Syrian men, I contend that men had to find a way in their narratives to reconcile

their flight to Egypt with the expectations others had of them because of their gender. Emphasising their pacifism was apparently one path to acceptable manhood in light of the inaccessibility of combat masculinity once they had decided to leave Syria. A conscious rejection of weapons and militarism seemed to have become an acceptable explanation to a female researcher as to why men chose to flee and then remain in Egypt.

Having listened to various reasons Syrian men put forward to point out why they were not fighting, I argue that it was one of several strategies among Syrian men who lived as refugees in Egypt to articulate a non-aggressive, non-violent masculinity. In light of the inaccessibility of combat masculinity outside Syria, their pacifism was one path to reaching an acceptable form of manhood. Given that in the context of conflict, non-combatant men's ability to achieve key elements that confirm the normative model of masculinity in which they have been socialised is severely reduced (Dolan 2003: 67; Jaji 2009), these men managed to stabilise themselves through the verbal adoption of the role of a passive, pacifist, non-violent refugee. Furthermore, articulating how they opted out of violence helped these men to present themselves as educated and belonging to the middle-class – an endeavour, in which Syrian men invested a lot of energy, as already detailed in previous chapters.

### ***Highlighting one's position as a father***

Another strategy of constructing an acceptable version of masculinity I observed among some Syrian men with children was to define themselves as sacrificing fathers. Among the Syrian men who had children, Abū Muḥammad was the one who spoke at length with me about his responsibilities and fears as a father. He described in great deal how he had tried to prevent his son from joining the armed groups in Syria.

“There is the problem that people take advantage of the enthusiasm of the young people. I told him [his son]: ‘I will stay here [in Egypt] and I will work in the field of helping people but if you want to go back I won’t stop you. Do what you want. It is your choice. But I will stay here.’ He answered: ‘You are more experienced than I am and you know more than me so I will stay with you and the family.’ So, he decided to stay. I told him that in case something happens to me he has to continue with my job. To be honest, I would have not let him leave, however, I brought it to him in this way, as if he had a choice. I used this way in order to impose it on him to stay. I wouldn’t have let him leave even if I would have had

to force him back then to come here because I know that anyone can do anything with him. So, I told him: ‘you have two options: either you leave or you help me in my work.’ I used this way to convince him”.

Abū Muḥammad stated his wish to protect his son from the people who might abuse his enthusiasm to volunteer for the good of the people, and described the strategy he used to avoid his son feeling that a decision was forced on him. Abū Muḥammad reminded his son of his manly responsibilities towards his family and himself. He continued explaining:

“Since the beginning of the uprising when we were still in Syria I was trying to protect my children from the psychological pressure of the uprising. Thanks God, I was able to do that until now. I consider this one of the achievements I made for my family. The achievement is that I protected (*janabtuhun*) them from the *aḥdāth* (incidents) physically and mentally so they didn’t influence them. If my son had been influenced by the *aḥdāth* he would have gone back to Syria to take revenge for his father in case something had happened to me. Now he might do nothing but maybe in ten years he would go. We decided that we don’t want to be with any group. We are just observers. All the sides make mistakes and we don’t want to be a part of them. If you need any help from humans, yes, we help, but use the correct way to ask for it. Our country is dear to us but now we cannot do anything for it because the allies also entered into this question. The best thing that I did in these years was to make my children avoid this kind of problems”.

Avoidance, apathy and pulling back are described as the most feasible and reasonable if not most heroic decisions. If he cannot find a meaningful position for himself from which he can protect his country, Abū Muḥammad, stated, he can at least protect his children.

Throughout our discussion, Abū Muḥammad argued that the loss of financial and economic resources became a problem during the uprising and that this led to the dilemma of deciding between providing for one’s family or joining the uprising. He said: “Imagine you demonstrate, you are with the revolution and you lose your job, so how can you feed your children?” His statement reinforces that a man must choose between his responsibility to stand up against an unjust regime and his responsibility to his family and offspring. He has to weigh two versions of himself against each other. He could have been engaged in protecting his country; however, he came to the conclusion that he was unable to defend it in accordance with his morals and values, namely in a “human way”. Instead, he turned to fatherhood and put all his efforts into protecting his family,

especially his son, from harm. He repeated his commitment to his family, and especially to his children, several times throughout our various conversations.

Achilli (2015: 270) analyses the ideals of masculinity available to young Palestinian men in a Jordanian refugee camp. He writes that besides the image of the heroic fighter for national liberation, there is the model of the male provider and nurturer of the family. Breadwinner masculinity serves as an alternative to the role of the fighter, however, the traits that are associated with breadwinner masculinity overlap with the female domain and thus they have to be negotiated (*ibid.*: 273). While both ideals of manhood, that of the fighter and that of the provider, can coexist in the lives of many young Palestinian refugee men, the reconciliation of contrasting registers of masculinity entails the potential for discrimination, failure and frustration (*ibid.*: 274). In Abū Muḥammad's case, defender masculinity and breadwinner masculinity cannot exist simultaneously. He had to make a decision between two lifestyles and two versions of masculinity. The role of the breadwinner he consciously assumed relates to protection, patriarchal authority, steadfastness and sacrifice, but in his case, also to political apathy.

In 2015, the UNHCR offered Abū Muḥammad and his family the chance to resettle to Germany. His children, he emphasised, were the main reason why he decided to accept the resettlement. He was convinced that he would be able to give them security, safety and a good education in Germany. When contrasting his life in Egypt with his children's future in Germany, he said:

“I cannot live my life like this working twenty-four hours. I go home and sleep and wake up and work. It's impossible. At the same time, I don't want to be unemployed. Also, there are problems in education and in health care [in Egypt]. There are also problems in many other fields. I think about them even when I am asleep. I don't want my children to live this way. That's why I will sacrifice my life, everything, in order to make them not live my life without shopping, without relaxation and anything to enjoy themselves. The other thing is: if they live and study in Egypt which future do they have? When I came from Syria I hardly managed to have a good situation here. It will be difficult for them. [...] The most important thing in my life are my children and once I said to me wife: ‘we already lived a good life. We used to go out a lot – so it's okay now!’”.

Abū Muḥammad explained that he was led by the goal of offering a better lifestyle to his children than the one he was then living in Egypt. Furthermore, he clarified again through this statement that he spoke from a middle-class perspective that defines a good life as

one that provides time for shopping, relaxation and pleasure. In order to offer his children such a lifestyle he limits his own needs and aspirations. He clearly defined himself as the caring and devoted father whose main focus in life is the well-being of his children. As described by Rabo (2005), Abū Muḥammad managed to make himself a respectable father and good head of household. He took over the role of the provider and at the same time he defines himself as an affectionate, caring and devoted father, a role that is regarded positively and an ideal that is defined as worth pursuing. Abū Muḥammad turned to fatherhood at a time when other ideals of manhood, such as the defender of one's country, were not available to him. In a way, he himself benefits from the sacrifice he describes as being willing to make for his children because it granted him legitimacy, authority and approval.

The theme of sacrifice for one's children, mentioned by Abū Muḥammad, occurred in several of the Syrian fathers' narratives. Firās, the father of two daughters who used to work in his father's factory in Syria but did not manage to find work in Egypt and prepared himself for his trip to Europe, repeated many times that he wanted to go to Germany via the Mediterranean Sea for the sake of his children. He said: "I am not travelling for myself, I am travelling for my children. I don't care for myself, I can live here, but they won't adapt to this country". When Firās put the sacrifice for his children to the fore, he managed to hide behind the valuable role of the caring father the many other reasons that might have influenced his decision to travel to Europe, such as his unemployment and lack of perspective in Egypt. I sometimes felt that Firās and Abū Muḥammad, benefitted themselves from emphasizing the sacrificing father role they claimed to have adopted.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has illustrated men's perception and critique of having grown up with no opportunity to circumvent enforced adaptation to a radical, militarised mindset. The state's interference in Syrian men's everyday lives from early childhood onwards is described as a painful experience. The uprising caused for many Syrian men a new and, so far unimaginable, confrontation with fear for their lives and those of their loved ones. Their fear is a new companion in their lives that is experienced as a heavy burden that continuously affects them. Hence, this chapter shows that conceptualisations of masculinities among refugees who have experienced war and violence need to pay

attention to the ways in which men deal with shock, trauma, despair and depression. Ultimately, masculinities should be understood as challenged, shaken and questioned by experiences of war, but, at the same time, as tensile and able to incorporate men's extreme emotions and memories.

Moreover, this chapter has shown that most Syrian men struggled with finding their place in the aftermath of the uprising – they did not know how to reconcile their values and expectations with military masculinity. Hence, several men articulated other versions of being a proper man, namely, through pacifism, a rejection of violence or fatherhood. The expression of different forms of ideal masculinity proves Syrian men's conscious effort to create an acceptable notion of manhood using what is available in their current context.

Ultimately, this chapter highlights both men's vulnerability during war as well as their agency and efforts to reformulate their masculinity and put it back on stable ground after it was shaken by their flight from Syria.

## **Conclusion: Mosaics of Masculinity**

This thesis has dealt with various themes that were of significant importance in, and defined the lives of, Syrian men who fled to Egypt. The ‘puzzle’ I would like to lay out in the conclusion has the ‘constants’ masculinity and forced displacement and then goes on to describe their entanglements and conjunctions with the state, middle-classness, patriarchy and emotions.

This work has shown that masculinity is relational and that it is dependent on and connected with others. An important ‘other’ for Syrian men being women. Women symbolised the weaker, less able and resilient counterpart, who were defined as in need of support and help from the hands of men. Women’s devaluation and the creation of a static image of femininity helped men to form a complementary valued form of masculinity. They existed in “contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). The existence of femininity, defined as weak, dependent and less resilient, guaranteed that men were never positioned in the lowest part of their social lifeworld. Nevertheless, this does not mean that women did not step in to help or support men – in fact, women had enormous power to protect or destroy men’s reputation, bestow or deny men recognition and legitimacy, and were aware of this power as identified by Ghannam (2013). Women even had the power to severely challenge men’s standing, for example, as unreachable and demanding brides or as ‘lost’ women, who married Egyptian men. Masculinities and femininities are thus interrelated and interdependent. Additionally, women defined the contours of the community (Yuval-Davis and Stoetzer 2002). Women’s value equated the values and standing of Syrians as a community and thus, men had various reasons to aim to control ‘their’ women. If Syrian women were perceived as ‘cheap’ or ‘easy to get’ it automatically caused a diminishment of ‘Syrianness’ and Syrian men’s position, as laid out in the third chapter. Consequently, I suggest conceiving of masculinity as not able to exist without a form of femininity, which is as much as possible discursively created by men themselves. Men construct femininities with an intention and a purpose – in this work I presented that femininities were formed to be the ‘other’, the controlled and the ‘boundary guards’ of the community.

It was not only women who were constructed as ‘others’ against which masculinity could be formed. Generally, the process of ‘othering’, that is, the process of reaching out to others to be able to understand oneself and defining one’s identity (Taylor

1994: 32), played a major role in Syrian men's constructions of masculinities. If constructions of masculinities are imagined using Monterescu's (2006: 129) metaphor of the 'polygon', then men should be positioned in the centre of this polygon. The various discursively created 'others' are vertices of the polygon, which are connected with the centre and function as referents and 'inferior alternatives' (*ibid.*). Constructions of masculinities then work by measuring, manoeuvring and manipulating the distances to these 'others'. Through the 'others', such as 'the refugee in Europe', the sectarian 'other' or 'the lazy Egyptian', firmly positioned at the vertices of the polygon, Syrian men could create their own, valued, respected masculinity in a time and situation, in which they were overwhelmed by unknown emotions, experiences and encounters. Despite the inflexibility of this model, the image of the polygon helps to understand masculinity as inherently relational and as composites and as drawing on the materials available in the social context (Connell 1995; Wentzell 2015) Doing masculinity has an account of agency, even though the agent needs to be understood as always acting within the given structures and norms (Butler 1999).

Throughout this thesis, I have presented several 'blows' that severely tested men. Among these challenges to masculinity were threats to Syrian men's role of provider and 'groom-ability' as well as Syrian men's remembered encounters and experiences with authoritarian, sectarian states. Several scholars have described men's confrontation with, and responses to, similar challenges by making use of the notion of 'masculinity in crisis' (e.g. Sa'ar and Yahia-Younis 2008; Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 2003; Barnes 2002; Kandiyoti 1994). Even though I recognise the severity of the various issues Syrian men were confronted with, I abstain from using the term 'crisis'. Connell (1995: 84) argues that the term 'crisis' requires a "coherent system of some kind, which is destroyed or restored by the outcome of the crisis". However, following Connell's overall reasoning, masculinity is not a system but rather "a configuration of practice within a system of gender relations" (*ibid.*) and thus, it only makes sense to speak of a disruption or a transformation of this configuration, for example in the form of attempts to restore a dominant masculinity or conflicts over strategies of legitimisation (*ibid.*: 85). Instead of speaking of 'masculinity in crisis', I consequently suggest conceiving of masculinity as tensile, elastic and resilient, because of its persistence and adaptability proven in its encounters, negotiations and reconciliation with challenging circumstances. Connell (2013: 56) describes masculinities in the security sector as "pragmatic", another attribute worth considering. She argues that masculinity is open to negotiation and change and opposes the assumption that men in contact with weapons, surveillance techniques and

legalised authority show violent or extreme masculinities. Similarly, I perceive it as more fruitful and more telling to highlight the expediency and resilience of masculinities when being confronted with the challenges of forced displacement, rather than turning towards dramatic attributions that only reinforce a notion of extreme manhood that requires violent measures to be reinstated.

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Different feelings flow through this thesis, such as fear, anger, sadness, hate or confusion. I have used these emotions as signposts and landmarks on a vast map that features Syrian men's experiences during forced displacement. Following Syrian men's expressed emotions became a way of knowledge-making and guided me to various underlying themes and connections. For instance, the fear of making use of the services of the Syrian embassy in Egypt became a way to understand the severe and ongoing impact of the Syrian *mukhābarāt* on Syrian men's lives. In addition to seeing emotions as signposts and an instrument of knowledge production, I suggest understanding emotions as markers of relations of power, depending on the social and historical context. Furthermore, emotions should be conceptualised as adhering and constitutive, and as contours of the individual's social reality. Building on the argument that emotions are connected to one's position in the social structure and to one's access to power (Pease 2012; Lutz 1996), I suggest that research dealing with emotions, masculinity and forced displacement is in a particular way able to provide nuanced answers to questions concerning constructions of masculinities, since forced displacement means an encounter with previously unknown forms and intensities of emotions.

As far as emotions as an aspect of constructions of masculinity are concerned, I recognised that most men did not capitalise on emotions. Rather, they experienced emotions as overwhelming, such as the numbing fear, sadness and depression they felt after the uprising, and tried to find ways to deal with them in their daily lives. I observed that men invested in dealing with their emotions in order keep their image, reputation, standing and position intact. In the context of the emotions they felt during and after the uprising, this meant that they had to repress them, ignore them and circumvent them. However, this did not lead to a refined or reformulated version of masculinity. Consequently, I distance myself from concepts, such as 'the new Arab man' (Inhorn

2012) or the new ‘sensitive’ man (Cottingham 2017) that confidently relate various emerging emotions in men to conscious changes of the ideal gender roles they hold on to.

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Looking at the emotions that migrated with Syrian men to Egypt and at the characteristics that could not travel, for example their social status and symbolic capital as laid out in the third chapter, I suggest conceptualising forced displacement as a process of both leaving behind and accepting the ‘sticky’ features that are ingrained in one’s self and do not disappear even with geographical and temporal distance. It does not come as a surprise that forced migration entails a process of letting go, leaving behind or cutting something out of one’s identity. There were obvious aspects of their lives that Syrian men had to leave behind, such as their homes, family and friends, network and possessions. Likewise, Syrian men could not take with them their taken-for-granted roles, social status, self-confidence and self-esteem based on their intact connection with the state. They lost, in Arendt’s (1973: 293) words, the “entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world”. At the same time, however, there were certain aspects that were based on Syrian men’s previous experiences, ways of having grown up and understanding the world that travelled with them to Egypt, were ‘sticky’, and defined their lives during forced displacement.

Anoop Nayak (2005: 141) uses the term ‘sticky’ to describe how the process of racialisation enables race to operate as a sign that magically adheres itself to bodies, places and a whole host of social activities. Following this argument, I suggest that forced displacement sheds light on the characteristics that have clung to Syrian men over the course of their lives in Syria. Among those adhering features are mistrust, fear, anxiety, and uncanniness that have their origin in an authoritarian regime and a sectarianised conflict. Ahmed (2004: 16) identifies emotions as ‘sticky’ and argues that they “move sideways (through ‘sticky’ associations between signs, figures and objects) as well as forwards and backwards (repression always leaves its trace in the present – hence ‘what sticks’ is bound up with the absent presence of historicity)” (*ibid.*: 45). She thus provides with a foundation for my observation that Syrian men’s emotions connected the past, the present and the future and that they followed them horizontally in their interactions, influencing their lives in various spatial contexts.

One of the leitmotifs emerging in this work is Syrian men's strong, yet ambivalent and paradoxical relation to the nation state. The significance of the state for Syrian men's lives shows in various forms: firstly, Syrian men's understanding of the state is expressed in the image of the abject 'other' embodied by the 'refugee in Europe', which I presented in the first chapter. The discourse around the undignified 'refugee in Europe' proves that, according to Syrian men's understanding, the citizen had the duty to aim for economic self-sufficiency and that depending on the state's welfare was not a dignified option. Furthermore, Syrian men were concerned about the invalidity of identity papers, such as passports or driving licenses, that could prove their identities and would be directly accepted by the Egyptian state and its authorities. Syrian men feared loss, expiration or invalidity of documents, which they directly related to a questioned, unsound personal identity. Closely connected to this theme was Syrian men's awareness of being effectively unprotected by the Syrian and the Egyptian state institutions during their forced displacement. State services, especially from the Syrian embassy, were perceived to be unavailable and the right to be protected from crime and ill will in Egypt seemed out of reach. Turning to alternative service providers, such as the UNHCR or other aid organisations, could not restore the stability Syrian men felt to have lost in exile. Missing their secure ground in the form of the citizen-state relationship caused several Syrian men to question themselves as human beings and their consequent right to be in this world, as described in the first chapter. They felt betrayed by a system that granted them an identity and rights based on a state-citizen relationship that they could, however, not resort to in Egypt. Their state had granted them a form of stability and security that they could not find during forced displacement and thus living in exile translated for most Syrian men to being an apathetic, disrespected, merely tolerated person, a guest, who could not risk behaving as if his citizen-state relationship was still intact. In Chapter 4, I described the nostalgia Syrian men expressed with regards to the UAR and their wish to see Syria developing in an economically and politically stable state, which holds international relations and is respected in the region and in the world. These narratives symbolise again men's longing for a state that could function as identity-establishing and as their backbone. Finally, Syrian men were conscious that they had lost a direct, securing connection to the state when they could not do what was defined as one of their duties as citizens, namely, protecting their country. Having lost their trust in the parties and groups involved in the uprising and the civil war, as described in the sixth chapter, most Syrian

men in Egypt felt unable to defend their home country. They did not see a setting for themselves through which they could engage in meaningful protection of their country and consequently had to leave their state behind.

One the one hand, Syrian men expressed in these various ways their difficulties in being without a strong Syrian state that functioned as their mainstay granting them rights, protection, responsibilities, duties and an unquestionable, strong identity. On the other hand, however, men were critical of the nation state's oppressive nature and were haunted by its omnipresent gaze and far-reaching control. They were aware of the state's privileging of certain sects, a theme that emerged in the fourth chapter. Moreover, they struggled to come to terms with the criminality of the Syrian regime: it was known to them that the regime and its authorities engaged in illegal activities, such as accepting bribes, nepotism and corruption, and Syrian men were aware that the state's criminality dragged them into the same illegal structures – the main theme of Chapter 5. They had to comply with a system that was immoral in most men's eyes and they blamed the state for the immorality enforced on them in their interaction with the state and the inability to conform to honourable versions of masculinity. They were aware that the state had major control over their lives, potential, development and aspirations. Furthermore, the state's security apparatus had left a mark on Syrian men, fixing in them a form of suspicion, self-surveillance and anxiety they could not get rid of. Growing up in Syria meant learning to live with an omnipresent and controlling state and this knowledge instilled in Syrian men self-control when it came to the expression of their political opinion, their interests and ideas. Furthermore, the state enforced a militaristic upbringing that men could not circumvent, whether they agreed with this kind of upbringing or were critical of it, as described in Chapter 6.

Based on these various forms in which the state appeared and impacted on Syrian men's lives, I argue that Syrian men had a paradoxical connection to the state that could, on the one hand, reassure them and back them up in their dominant role in society, but could, on the other hand, severely damage them, plague them, exhaust them and ultimately challenge them in their masculinity. The state was a provider of their masculinity but at the same time it robbed them of their manhood. Upon their forced displacement, when their contact to the state had ultimately changed, Syrian men severely critiqued the state but simultaneously bemoaned its loss. Syrian men felt both insecure and fragile in the absence of the state, but at the same time suffocated and tortured in their experiences and encounters with it. Because of men's initial specific relation to the nation state (see. Joseph 2000) and the loss of structure, self-confidence and self-assurance

during forced displacement described throughout this thesis, I suggest that men experience a specific form of loss if they are not in direct touch with their state when living in exile.

Ultimately, I argue that research on the contact of men with the state during their forced displacement shows the ambivalences and paradoxes that defines these relationships and would have otherwise remained hidden under the surface.

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Given that states provide structures, meanings and order, Syrian men were in the challenging situation to regain such structures, meanings and order during forced displacement. They had to reformulate the values of their identity as Syrians. One of the structures and values that warranted reconstruction was patriarchy. States nurture a patriarchal societal order from which men benefit (Joseph 2000: 116). Given the Syrian regime's authoritarianism, it is useful to understand patriarchy in Syria as "a system of male privilege in the social order that functions as a recompense to men for their disempowerment vis-à-vis the state" (Ismael and Ismael 2000: 185). In such a patriarchal order, "women are to men what the citizen is to the state" (Akgul 2017: 2), namely the controlled ones. Outside Syria, men could not access a state-supported patriarchal system and thus had to create it on their own while being in Egypt. I suggest that lacking access to 'patriarchy-as-usual' (Kandiyoti 2013) during forced displacement was one of the reasons why most Syrian men could not reconcile the fact that women took over increased responsibilities to provide for the families, as I presented in the second chapter. In a patriarchal society, providing income and being in charge of a family still determines being a (middle-class) man (see Schielke 2012). The firmness with which Syrian men discussed women's labour in Egypt and the force with which they relegated women to the household confirm the severity of the issue. Consequently, I argue that the men's loss of the citizen-state connection impacts indirectly on gender relations and leads to a defence of the realms Syrian men used to control, at least in the idealised, discursive constructions of Syrian gender roles. The road to stabilising 'patriarchy-as-usual', which Kandiyoti (2013) calls 'masculinist restoration' referring to higher levels of coercion by the state in times in which notions of female subordination are no longer securely hegemonic, was in the case of Syrian men in Egypt to protect what used to be a strong

pillar of their masculinity and similarly secured their patriarchal control: their role as provider and women's consequent 'luxury' to stay at home.

Directly related to the conservative approach to gender relations that puts men in the provider position and women as their counterpart to the household is an underlying theme that was similarly present in various other debates that emerged in this thesis: the importance of middle-classness. Belonging to the middle class was a dominant and defining marker of identity among Syrians in Egypt. They associated middle-classness with success, education, hard work, creativity, smartness, resilience and stamina. Their continuous struggle to confirm their class position shows that for Syrian men losing their middle-class status was not an option. Being middle class was seen and used as a proof of their intellect, behaviour and access to the world. Furthermore, being middle class guaranteed respect, aspirations and self-esteem (see Schielke 2012). A major aspect of concern that related to their middle-classness was Syrian men's access to paid labour. Paid labour in an accepted and respected profession was a way to prove their inherent values, such as creativity, diligence, hard work, stamina, inventiveness and their education. In Egypt, however, Syrians were confronted with vulnerability, instability and precarity in the labour market, and what peeked around the corner, seemingly waiting for them at any minute, was unemployment, to which shame, idleness and dependency were ascribed. When looking at the importance of work in an honourable profession and the fear of unemployment, as described in the second chapter, it can be argued that being middle class was, as suggested by Heiman et al. (2012), related to a constant fear of being unable to prove it.

Moreover, Syrian men experienced that established class structures in Egypt were subject to change: especially bachelors trying to get married in Egypt realised that they were not recognisable as decent, middle-class men anymore and could not rely on what used to define them, as I described in the third chapter. Syrian men were unrecognisable because the family of a potential spouse could not access the 'frame of reference' (Rabo 2005) by which a potential groom is socially classified, that is, they could not access knowledge about his family's reputation, his place of origin, his upbringing and education. Several young men feared that class differences or the inability to prove one's initial class status would cause rejection. Other bachelors looking for brides, however, realised that Syrians' mutually experienced forced displacement had put them and the bride's family in the same situation and that previous class differences were erased. What is obvious is that traditional class boundaries were differently experienced: some men sensed that they sharpened or kept intact, while others witnessed that they had become

blurry and porous. Consequently, I come to the conclusion that, as similarly described in the literature (e.g. Muhamna 2013; Edward 2007), traditional barriers and statuses do not remain static, but are subject to change in times of crisis, uncertainty and liminality. Moreover, I observed that the changing values ascribed to class and the unpredictable handlings of and responses to traditional class structures caused confusion, insecurity and uproar, which confirms Reay et al.'s (2009: 1105) argument that "when habitus encounters a field with which it is not familiar, the resulting disjunctions can generate not only change and transformation, but also disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty".

Class needs to be understood as a "relational and interproductive phenomenon" (Heiman et al.: 13) emerging in relation to other classes. This relational characteristic is obvious when paying attention to Syrian men's implicit creation of 'other' social classes to be able to demarcate and refine their own social position. I suggest that Syrian men created a class structure that functioned as visible markers in relation to which they could define their middle classness by relating to 'other men' who had chosen less respected life paths or proved to have shameful morals. Syrian men implicitly described themselves as middle class, when they positioned themselves vis-à-vis 'refugees in Europe', who beg and wait for the welfare system to take care of them, or the 'lazy Egyptian worker', who prefers cheating over honest, hard work, presented in the fourth chapter. Consequently, I argue that being middle class should not only be conceptualised as relational and interproductive, but also as both a conscious and an unconscious endeavour (see Rizzo 2015; Bourdieu 1985). Furthermore, I suggest that class is constituted through gender and vice versa. This idea is based on an argument put forward by Connell (2013) in the context of her analysis of constructions of masculinities among men in the security sector. She argues that "we see class (on a global scale) being constituted by gender, rather than intersecting with it" (*ibid.*: 56). Connell herself does not develop this thought further in the chapter, however, thinking of gender and class as constituting each other rather than intersecting is a fruitful starting point for my own analysis. I observed that Syrian men engaged in actions and efforts to form class and masculinity that were often overlapping. The refugee in Europe is not only an (emasculated) man but an (emasculated) classed man, likewise, the Egyptian lazy worker is not only a man, but a man showing values that do not align with middle-classness. Thus, in the context of forced displacement, in which both masculinity and social class structures are shaken and in need to be re-invented, these aspects are not only interrelated and intersecting, but are actively constituted through each other.

Overall, social class proves to be a significant object of analysis in the context of forced migration, since it sheds light on how men position themselves, try to prove their identity and lay out their life trajectories. Furthermore, social class should be understood as an instrument of hierarchisation and a parameter of judgement of others.

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Fādī's reaction to a begging woman on the streets of Cairo made me question my assumed knowledge at the beginning of my fieldwork in 2014. With a description of his actions, I started this work and with a reference to his situation I will end it. Despite all his efforts, ideas and trials, Fādī did not manage to remain on the path he aspired to follow. His dream is to become an engineer, however, he had to interrupt his studies at the university after he had successfully finished his first year. He could not afford the university fees and his family needed his support in the little corner shop they had bought. Fādī thinks about leaving Egypt for Europe, he wonders whether there are scholarships for which he could apply, and he has calculated that if he takes on a second shop in the evenings after he finishes his shift in his parents' corner shop, he might be able to go back to university in the coming semester to continue with his studies. He hopes that after graduation from university he will be able to get married and live a more settled life.

The work on this PhD has finished after four years, but Fādī's as well as other Syrians' struggles in Egypt, other parts of the Middle East and Europe are far from over: their daily challenges in finding work, dealing with the refugee label, uncertainty, liminality and the loss of their home, status and capital, the coming to terms with their memories and experiences of Syria, the uprising and the civil war, as well as the challenges to find a secure future and liveable present, are an on-going condition.

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