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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Who Am I Without Exile? | Syrian Everyday Life in Cairo

A Thesis Submitted to
The Cynthia Nelson Institute for Gender and Women's Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (M.A) in Gender and Women's Studies
in the Middle East / North Africa

Specialization in Gendered Political Economies

by Banan Abdelrahman
under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

August/ 2017

من انا روت منفي

Who Am I Without Exile? | Syrian Everyday Life in Cairo

Banan Abdelrahman

IGWS M.A Thesis | Gendered Political Economies

Under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

Committee Members: Dr. Hanan Sabea & Dr. Gerda Heck

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has been approved by:

Dr. Martina Rieker

Thesis Adviser

Affiliation

Dr. Hanan Sabea

Thesis Reader

Affiliation

Dr. Gerda Heck

Thesis Reader

Affiliation

Dr. Martina Rieker

Department Chair

_____ Date: _____

Nabil Fahmy, Ambassador

Dean of SPA

_____ Date: _____

The night is beautiful.
So the faces of my people.
The stars are beautiful.
So the eyes of my people.
Beautiful, also, is the sun
Beautiful, also, the souls of my people.

-Langston Hughes

الليل جميل
كوجوه شعبي
النجوم جميلة
كعيون شعبي
جميلة ايضاً الشمس
جميلة ايضاً روح شعبي

لانجستون هيوز

*to my beautiful people.
and to mama & baba, always to
mama & baba.*



Acknowledgements

On the first weekend of February 2014, activists in Lampedusa, Italy gathered to write the Charter of Lampedusa. Premised on the notion that the Earth is a shared space, and thus moving within it must not be hindered by constructed obstructions such as militarized borders and migration laws, the Charter was a response to the hundreds of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, which has become the new frontier for cemeteries. On that weekend, thousands of miles and various bodies of waters away, I was rushing to make the deadline to apply to AUC- I missed it.

A year later, I had learned from my mistakes, and on the first anniversary of the Charter, successfully applied and received a fellowship that gave me the opportunity to attend AUC. I did not know then about the Lampedusa Charter, nor did I know much else about the fields I was studying. But as I began attending classes, and reading/ barely reading/ not reading the assignments, I began to be grounded. The process was not an easy one, and often times, I found myself on the verge of leaving it all behind. Yet within these moments, I found my anchors for whom without, I would have spent my time adrift and lost:

To my advisor: Dr. Martina Rieker, for whom I am eternally indebted to for her guidance, her mentorship, and her humor that often left me wondering- *wait, is that supposed to be a good thing?* Martina, your kindness and patience at my eclectic ways of being a student speaks to your teaching philosophy- one that is a lifelong project that transcends humdrum institutions and neoliberal modes of beings.

To my committee members: Dr. Hanan Sabea, whose lectures and interjections served as the springboard with which I took on analyzing this project. It takes a wise professor to have her students pause and question their very existence. Dr. Gerda Heck, whose kind presence, and grounded comments, helped me look at my work with a fresh perspective. I am only sad that your time at AUC begins as my time ends.

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To my roots: Thank you Mama and Baba, for letting us know that even though you have been living the isolation of diasporic roads since your childhoods, you made sure your children knew that wherever this shifting world takes them, your open arms are the safest and surest destinations. To my siblings, Mujahid, Hadiya, and Asyah, for laughs, support, and always reminding me to be humble- because unemployment awaits me as soon as I receive my degree. To my unsung heroes at the eleventh hour: Ayah Ab, Shashi, Claire B, Claire M, Aya S, and Minna. And to Alaa, Takmila, Sherif, Souad, Nagla, Sarah E, Tiba, Tarek, Diana, Silvia, and the Sakars, for their love and light. And for my family in Egypt, who helped me find the ways to remember.

Coming to Egypt, I did not know what to expect, how I would be able to create markings of home in a territory that for so long existed as traces in others conversations- never really existing in mine. I should not have worried, however, because in the Syria Relief Foundation, and the friendships I formed in it, I soon realized homes are temples within our loved ones, and often times, these lights guide you in the darkness. Thank you to the family I have found in SRF, and special gratitude to Omar, Bassem, Leila, Fayez, Lama, Adnan and Amal, who gave this thesis the soul from which it emerged. May we one day share a cup of tea in the Syria of your dreams.

To becoming: And may we one day see a world in which the need for charters would wane, and these charters, like the Charter of Lampedusa, would serve as archaic relics of a world long gone. Until then, I cling to the words of Arundhati Roy, “*another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.*”

Abstract

Who Am I Without Exile? | Syrian Everyday Life in Cairo

Banan Abdelrahman

The American University in Cairo

under the supervision of Dr. Martina Rieker

This thesis examines the fluidity and complexity of the everyday lives of Syrians in Egypt. While it is not meant to be comprehensive, and speaks to the very particular social in which the research was conducted, this project seeks to disrupt the processes with which categorizations and solid understandings of migration and refugeeness emerge. It argues that neat understandings of the everyday is not possible, but rather, a closer reading uncovers the undoing and reassembling of the intricate relations at play- processes that speak to the very core understandings of power, governance, and sovereignty. By methodologically employing the idea of the *mess*, the fragmented way in which the self navigates a contradictory everyday life becomes visible: a process that is rife with myriad encounters with various forms of powers.

The thesis grapples with everyday mundane events, and not so mundane events, to trace the paths which the self configures, be it through the moment of arrival, bureaucratic navigation, modes of survival, community imagination, or the potentialities of reconfiguration. This thesis attempts to push away from the rhetoric of brush-stroking experiences assumed to be interchangeable, like “Syrian” and “refugee”, and concludes instead with a note on embracing the world that is in flux.

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Image 1: Bassam Mohamed took this picture as he was waiting for his passport in front of the Syrian Embassy in Cairo. He posted it on social media, with the watermark quoting a popular nationalistic song lyric: "I am Syrian, Lucky me". (Republished with his permission © April, 2017)

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Prologue

It is said that when you leave your home one last time, not knowing when you'll return, the final glance back pauses time. In that pause, the house comes to life. The wooden arch filled with marks to measure your height as you grew taller shakes, the indents of years of the hands that rested on the arch begin moving- trying to expel the memory of its past life from it. The curtains whisper their goodbyes, and the house begins its descent into mourning. Your books begin conjuring spells to make you stay, and the photos that were left behind begin to wilt, anticipating the absence of a loving and nostalgic gaze. Here, a family lived, and here, because of life, the family has left.

Homes leave a mark in us, traces that we carry to new places, until home begins shifting from place to people to country to place to people to country to place to people to- what country? New homes are a continuity of past homes, milieus entrenched with the scent of a lost familiarity. It is to this we belong, and to this, where our thoughts, wherever we are, return.

i. Leila

I first met Leila at the end of 2013, during my first visit to Syria Relief Foundation's (SRF) Oubur office. Introduced as a volunteer, she was in her late teens, and quite shy. We didn't interact much, and because I met so many different people that day, I left without remembering her name. When I returned in the summer of 2015, I met Leila again at SRF's main office, where she was now employed. She became one of my closest friends, and as we became familiar with each other, she became an important point of reference throughout my fieldwork. A natural storyteller, Leila has told me many stories- of friends who left to Europe through the Mediterranean sea, of her family's history, of everyday interactions she had in

Egypt. One day, late at night, she told me the story of her friend, Heba, from Halab, who left Alexandria with her family to Europe via the sea. "The sea was terrifying", Leila recalls Heba saying in her first phone call after she reached her destination, "and at one point, my mother and I did not think we could make it out alive." Leila pauses then, and thinking out loud, muses, "can you imagine, Heba told me that on their shaky boat, there was nothing but darkness around them". The smugglers, to elude authorities, had turned off all lights on the boat, and the passengers relied on the full moon's light to recognize each other and the waves crashing around them. The moon, to them, then transformed into their savior, and Leila recalls her friend telling her that they pinned all their hopes of a safe arrival on the moon. As the girl and her mom looked at it, Leila narrates, they began hallucinating that it was smiling for them, and only them. Leila pauses, saying "it's tough to imagine, but when you're at sea, the sea takes on a different meaning, it becomes all you see, and its power the strongest power center yourself to". Her tone gave the impression that this experience was felt firsthand, so I asked her how she could relate to this story, and she said, surprised I didn't know, "well, I came to Egypt by boat- but a legal boat, not like hers, an official streamliner". I was shocked, because until that moment, I never thought about arrival stories in of themselves- when I was introduced to someone new, I usually echoed those around me, and simply asked, "when did you arrive?", "where in Syria are you from?". It had gotten late into the night by the time Leila finished Heba's story, and we were both tired, exhausted from the late hours, and the story that echoed within us, leaving a shaky silence between Leila and I. Recalling the story reminded Leila of the emotional turmoil she went through, and we shelved the topic of her arrival.

Leila began telling me her story a few weeks later, as we sat sipping tea in my balcony on an early Friday morning. It was a chilly morning, and the street, as is usual on Fridays in

Cairo, was empty under us; a light breeze bristling the leaves on the trees framing my balcony cast a calm feel to the scene. As we sat, and Leila began her story, we watched as my neighbors began waking up, as the slow hum of life began. Her family left Halab when it became too dangerous, she started. They were urged to leave by their worried brother, Amer, who has been living in Saudi Arabia for the past twelve years, and was worried he would not be able to reach them if something happened¹. By that point, in mid 2013, her family had already moved from their original home two times. They left Leila's childhood home- for what they assumed was a temporary move- because it was on a main road in central Halab, thus making it a popular route for protesters, whom naturally brought with them the army tanks to combat them. Consequently, maneuvering the streets became overwhelming, especially because this lack of mobility was coupled with a constant cut in electricity, water and internet. "We were living, but we weren't", Leila says. They moved to their aunt's house, who had moved to Italy decades ago, leaving her house empty. After a few months, however, it's proximity to an army base rendered it dangerous, so her family picked up everything again and went to her grandfather's house. Her grandfather's house was large, standing as a relic to a time when Leila's family would gather for Eids, weddings and funerals. Her grandfather had been one of the prominent cloth merchants in Halab, her last name known and respected everywhere it was mentioned. It was fitting that it stood by Bab Hadid; the last house Leila and her family lived in was located by one of the nine ancient gates that surrounded Halab, and still symbolizes one of the entry and exit point to Halab. Al Mutanabbi, one of the most famous and legendary Arab poets, fled

¹ Saudi Arabia's, and the GCC's Kefala system, is a visa sponsorship program that ties migrant workers legal status to their sponsors. The sponsor bears responsibility for almost all aspects of the migrant worker's life including granting permission to change jobs or even return to their country of origin. Many human rights abuses are reported due to many sponsors' exploitation of their sponsee, and Amer is example of that relationship: his sponsor did not allow him to go see his family for twelve years, withholding his paperwork.

Halab in 957, escaping persecution from the Abbasids. He sought refuge in Egypt about a thousand years before Leila and her family trekked through Bab Hadid to leave: *is human history anything but a flow of fleeing and seeking refuge?* Perhaps Leila's constant moving before she finally left was Halab's way of preparing Leila for her imminent departure, gradually moving her from the center of Halab to its edges, where she would finally depart, and like Al Mutanabbi, make her eventual journey to Egypt.

Her grandfather's home became the center once more, as eventually her cousin and his large family joined them after his house was destroyed in a bombing. After seven months from departing Leila's childhood home, her family decided to leave Halab. Initially, her father resisted leaving, but Leila's sister, Razan, and Amer couldn't handle the situation any more, and insisted. Leila explains, "everything stopped, we couldn't go to school, we couldn't go out with our friends, and if someone left the house, we could never be sure they'll come back; it wasn't only the danger of death that scared us, but it was also the fear of getting kidnapped or raped". "Halab changed", Leila sighed, "people from outside came, you didn't know where the people were from, it was chaos, theft became commonplace". After the decision was made to leave, a look at their options determined that Turkey was too expensive, Jordan difficult, and Lebanon unstable. Egypt, it seemed, was the most suitable option, partly because they already had family there, partly because the government seemed to accept Syrians and so they imagined everyday life would be easier. The only problem was, they had many belongings to pack, besides their necessities- their family in Egypt had warned them that they would not find any Syrian products. *How do you pack a lifetime?* They decided that in order to take all their belongings, about twenty-three pieces in total, it would be easier to go to Egypt via the sea. The

only way to the port was through Turkey, which could only be reached by driving through the border.

At 6 am, on March 3rd, 2013, Leila's family packed the truck, and made it to the border, unsure of what to expect. Rumors and anecdotes said people would go and stay at the border for days, waiting for a green-light from Turkey to let them in. When they arrived to the border, Turkey would not allow the car carrying the food and clothes they packed in, and only allowed the car to stop at the farthest point in the border. Only Leila, her sister, and parents were there. They were forced to move the luggage by themselves, all twenty-three pieces, and since her father and mother's health did not allow for them to help, the burden of carrying it all fell on Leila and Razan. Leila recalls falling from exhaustion on the ground in front of the Turkish guard, crying and requesting that he allow the driver to carry the things with them. He relented. They waited for five hours before the Turkish authorities allowed them to enter Turkey. The border takes about two hours to cross, and so they had to carry the luggage piece by piece, back and forth between Turkey and Syria. When she was telling me the story, she tearfully pauses, she was transported to that day, remembering the moment, how wrenching it was. She recalls the feelings of despair and regret that fell upon them, they almost decided to turn back to Halab. ~~*No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark*~~ ~~*Nayyriah Waheed (2015)*~~ They walked back and forth between the borders, back and forth, carrying the luggage, until finally, everyone and everything had crossed the border. She would know, every time she did this sa'ay², that she finally reached the Turkish side when her peripheral vision was filled with Turkish flags.

² Sa'ay is the back and forth trek between the two hills, Safaa and Marwa, that Muslims perform in their pilgrimages to Makkah. Muslims travel between the hills seven times to honor Hajar, the Egyptian wife of Prophet Abraham, who ran between the hills to search for water for her infant son, Ismael.

They finally were able to rest a bit in the car on the way to the Port of Alexandretta, where they were set to depart to begin their next leg of the journey. They arrived at the port by 9 pm, and booked the ferry to depart to Egypt a few days later. They spent the next few days decompressing, spending most of their days standing on an hill in the port where they could see Syria, where the smoke from fighting in the war was visible. On the third day, the worse day of her life, as she branded it, they were getting ready to board the ferry. She, along with the other Syrians on her boat, stood- stood, not sat- and waited eight hours to board. When they finally boarded, once it started moving, they could not believe it. It was only then did the reality of finally leaving Syria set in, and the questions began: would they ever return? Would they make it? What did the future hold?

The trip took 23 hours, and on the ferry, they met Syrians from everywhere. Usually, the top deck held people with legitimate paperwork, while those who were escaping army service, or did not have any Syrian paperwork (the Nawar), hid at the bottom of the boat. Leila said she did not think anyone hid on their boat. However, on her ferry, there were a lot of Nawar, noting that Hafez Al Assad gave some of them passports. They were so different from Syrians, their habits and lifestyles repulsive, Leila explained. She recalls how the Syrians who imagined themselves as true Syrians would recoil in disgust at their habits.

There was a point on their trip where she saw nothing but sea, everywhere she turned was endless sea, and she was listening to the Quran, Surat Al Qiyama (The Resurrection). On the bench she was sitting at, she was joined by her sister and an elderly couple, listening to the Surah (Chapter) with her. It was as though, she said, the verses were being read in tune with the waves crashing around them. As the verses played, they all began crying, “even the elderly man”, Leila said.

6. *Yas-alu ayyana yawmu alqiyamati* 7. *Fa-itha bariqa albasaru*
8. *Wakhasafa alqamaru* 9. *WajumiAAa alshshamsu waalqamaru* 10. *Yaqoolu al-
insanu yawma-ithin ayna almafarru* 11. *Kalla la wazara* 12. *Ila rabbika yawma-ithin
almustaqarru*

*[He asks, "When is the Day of Resurrection?"(6) So when vision is dazzled (7) And the
moon darkens (8) And the sun and the moon are joined (9) Man will say on that Day,
"Where is the [place of] escape?" (10) No! There is no refuge (11) To your Lord, that
Day, is the [place of] permanence (12)] (Surah Al Qiyama, verse 6 to 12)*

They began wondering out loud if they will ever reach their destination. They discussed Egypt and its cities, trying to understand a geography they have yet to see. Leila and her family were headed towards Monfeyah, a rural district outside of Cairo, to meet the family of one of Amer's co-workers. People were asking each other if they heard of different cities, and the name Oubur came up several times. They arrived to Port Said on March 10th, where they soon realized that the authorities handling the entry procedures were overwhelmed with the sheer number of Syrians on the boat (about 2000 people), and were fumbling to hand back the passports to them. Leila and Razan stepped in and began organizing the lines, passing the passports to their rightful owners. Leila stood in the front of the line, Razan at the end, and they began calling out the names of the people. As a result, the process took less than an hour. At the end of their help, the Sergeants were so grateful, and offered them an official salute and shared their contact numbers in case the girls might need any help.

When they disembarked, they discovered that the car they had arranged for did not show up, and the driver was not answering his phone. It was this moment that overwhelmed her father the most, Leila recalls seeing him moving to stand away from them and crying from exhaustion over an ordeal that does not seem to be ending. They called the Sergeant to help them find a driver and a truck, which he managed to do. Leila laughs as she remembers how this was her first impression of Egyptians, "he was the first Egyptian we met, and he was such a

gentleman”. The journey to Monufieya was seven hours, and they were driving in the dead of the night, enveloped in darkness, Leila was terrified the driver might sleep at the wheel, or might do something to them, so while her family slept, she remained awake, alert at every speed bump and turn. When they reached Shibin el Koum, a small city in rural Monufieya, Razan and Leila refused to even leave the car. She said that they were surrounded by mountains of garbage, so large she felt as though it would consume them, with the largest pile forming right outside their hotel. Her father immediately called one of his friends in Egypt, who told him to come to Oubur directly. Leila and her family stayed in his small three-bedroom apartment for ten days. Her father immediately began looking for apartments, while Leila’s body gave into the exhaustion she had been holding off, she remained in bed for a week after she arrived. When they used to lift her arms, she said, “it would fall straight back down with a thud”, she did not have the energy or the capability to hold it up. She spent most of her time crying for Syria, the journey, and could not handle hearing the voice of her brother who remained behind in Halab, with his newly wed wife. “And that’s it” Leila sighs, this was our life now, and we started new”.

It was difficult in the beginning, as money was tight, and they needed many necessities, “we were well off in Syria”, Leila states, “it was hard to adjust to a less luxurious life- my mother had a hard time finding furniture she liked with the budget we had”. Soon Syrian acquaintances told them they had to go to The United Nation’s Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to register as refugees. Razan began working at Syria Foundation, and with help from their brother in Saudi Arabia, they were able to reestablish a sense of stability In Egypt. Her family adjusted quickly to Egypt, Leila proudly states, unlike many Syrians who were pining for home, a notion she found ridiculous, as people should adjust to life, she thought, and take

what skills they learn with them, so that when they return, they can help in to rebuilding Syria. “Everything changed in Syria, its people, its streets, even the rocks and bricks”, so when people moan on how “there is nothing like Syria, they are talking about Syria in the past”. The Syria that they imagine no longer exists. Leila concludes that she, and Syrians, should live in the moment they are in now, to try to find ways to accept the lots that life has thrown at them. “We will go back to Syria different people, with the new experiences we gained from Egypt, and we’ll be joined by Syrians who lived everywhere. Syria will never be the same”.

A few months after our balcony sitting, as we were watching “*Fantastic Beasts And What To Do With Them*”, a movie that saw the destruction of New York due to a wizard battle, and is restored at the end through a magical spell; a spell which also allowed for its residents to forget the horror of the battle they witnessed. I caught Leila crying next to me in the theaters, “Imagine we could do this to Syria, restore it all as easily as these magicians did, and forget what happened? I know”, she sighs while wiping away her tears, this only happens in movies”.

ii. Adnan

While sitting at the SRF office, Adnan, one of the staffers who I have grown particularly close to, asked me about my research. We were sitting in our usual positions, he at his desk working on whatever design he had to produce- a banner that has SRF’s logo next to whichever new INGO project SRF was implementing, or business cards for the ever-revolving door of employees (employees who leave because INGO’s hire them as “native staff”, leave because they found more lucrative jobs, have been resettled in the West, or have moved to Turkey etc.); me at the desk next to him, attempting to do work but instead going through track after track of songs until we decide on the one we both approved of as background music. Lama, the Media Coordinator, rummaging around us, attempting to find the items she seemed

to have misplaced, as usual. After a long winded conversation about my research, which spanned what seemed to be a chaotic rambling of ideas, Adnan, seeing that I was interested in arrival stories, shared his story of why and when he came to Egypt. Adnan's family lived in Daraya, considered to be part of the rural suburb at the outskirts of Damascus. He recalls going to protests with his father when they first started, recalls the anger they all felt about the murder of the boys in Daraa that sparked the latest run of protesters. Things were stable and unstable, and at his house, movement paralleled the new curfew times established by the Nizam (Bashar Al-Assad's regime)- the curfew determined when the day started and when the day ended. He talks about his home, its location on the outskirts of Daraya meant that on days with no traffic, it was a fifteen minute drive to Damascus; but more importantly, it was located next to the army air base from which he and his siblings used to watch as the war planes ascended everyday. It used to shake his entire house, he said, and often signaled a new wave of bombings, if not in Daraya then at its peripheries. In the August of 2012, there was a curfew that lasted a week, no one could leave the house. Everything was cut off, and there was no way for them to know what was going on outside- besides the thundering booms that signaled a barrel bomb- a favorite weapon of the Assad regime, due to its cheap and local production- had been dropped. On the eve of August 25th, his father, after conferring with the neighbors, got word that the curfew may be over, so he decided to leave to get some food and basic necessities that the family had run out of. A few hours later, his father did not return, and Adnan was told to go check the town square as there were rumors something may have happened. As he walked towards the square, he began to gather details from people journeying to check on their family members as well. There was a checkpoint, someone said, they stopped everyone who came through it, lined them up, and executed them with live

ammunition, close range. As he was walking, he saw a family member on his way to look for a relative who had left to do the same. When he reached the square, he found lines of bodies on the floor, and as he walked around them, he found the bodies of his father and aunt amongst the dead, lying next to each other, and the injured body of another aunt near by. She lived to tell them what happened. They were all on the way to the market, she said, to get food and as they all passed through the checkpoint, they were all forced to line up and then shot point blank with no explanation or warning given. It happened that quickly: with a trigger, one ceased to be. Adnan pauses, clearing his throat and stating, "I don't want to think about this anymore". Up until that moment, you could hear a pin drop in the room. Lama and I had gone silent. "Is that why you decided to come to Egypt?", I asked. "We were in Egypt a few months later", he responded. Adnan was eighteen at that time, preparing to take his final high school exam. He had uncles in Egypt, he said, and they booked them flights from Damascus to Cairo. Once they arrived in Cairo, they stayed between an uncle in 6th of October City, and an uncle in Alexandria before they finally decided to settle in 6th of October, because of the prominent Syrian presence, where is its now dubbed "Little Damascus. Ever since September 1st, 2012, Adnan's father's picture has been his Facebook profile picture, with the only interruptions of pictures commemorating other deaths in the family, but always returning to a picture of his father. This conversation happened not long after the siege of Daraya, which lasted from late 2012 until August 2016, and ended when a deal between the Syrian Armed Forces and the rebels brokered the removal of all remaining civilians and rebel family members, many of whom were relocated to Idlib, a stronghold city for the rebels. By then, the population had dwindled to a few thousand, as the mass exodus from Daraya began almost as soon as the

revolution did. Two years after the death of Adnan's father, the city that saw his demise ceased to exist as they all remembered it.

iii. Lama

Lama chimed in quietly after Adnan finished his story, retelling her story as well. She begins by first asking me, “do you know, I'm not from Al-Sham³ originally, my grandparents were displaced from the Golan Heights, and my grandmother is Palestinian”. In Lama's memory, displacement and borders that demarcated her understanding of her self were etched long before her recent journey outside of Syria. This loss manifested in her family's tactical resilience to their displacement, equipping them with the ability to dismantle and create quickly. Lama's family had comfortably established themselves in one of Damascus's suburbs, successfully running several businesses. Lama was in her first year of law school, pursuing her life long dream of becoming a judge. When the war broke out, her father became worried that the banks would fail, so he took out all his cash, and bought several apartment buildings and plots of land. As the war began edging closer to the peripheries of Damascus, and her town began seeing the exodus of neighbors and friends, her family made the overnight decision to leave. After toying with the idea of Jordan, Egypt was chosen, and her brother, Salim, who lives in Saudi Arabia, bought them tickets to Beirut and promised them he would support them in Egypt when they reached there. As they drove across the Lebanese border, and during the two hours that took them to get to the airport, Lama said she was content with knowing she will return in a month or so. In Beirut, they attempted to call her brother, whose phone seemed to be turned off. Repeated attempts to reach him failed, and they boarded the plane not knowing what to expect in Cairo. When they arrived to Cairo, her brother, who had supposedly

³ Sham, or Al-Sham in Arabic translates to the Levant region, however, in Syrian colloquial dialect, it means Damascus.

arranged for everything, was still not reachable. They didn't know where to go or how to navigate the city. They took an airport taxi, and the driver helped them find an apartment in Salah Salem Street, a main road close to Islamic Cairo and the Citadel in central Cairo. They stayed there for a few weeks, worried about their brother and his radio silence, and were attempting to adjust to this new city. As they began talking to people, they were told that there are a lot of Syrians in the 6th of October, and they headed there, looking for Syrian food, products and atmosphere.

Her father's anxiety increased with each passing day his son didn't contact him; their money was beginning to run out and he was yet to find a job. The family began to think Salim abandoned them, and just as they were beginning to turn bitter, they received a phone call from him. He had been arrested for getting into an accident and wrecking the car of a member from the Saudi royal family and Salim was unable to contact them before his eventual release. This meant that any assistance he could have provided evaporated, as his run-in with the royal family proved to be costly. However, with the connections formed through new friends made in 6th of October, both Lama's parents were able to secure jobs. Her mother, a teacher back in Syria, became a principal of a Syrian community school in the 6th of October, and as a result Lama and her family moved to Shiekh Zayed, at the outskirts of 6th of October. At first, Lama refused to believe that she had left Syria for good, remembering the period of deep depression she fell into when she first arrived, and realized the "*maybe next month*" had stretched to half a year, to a year, to years. Her family, in an attempt to get her out of the house, registered her in the Media and Journalism School in Cairo University. She credits her family for helping her ease out of her depression, and she began working with her friends as an interior designer before moving to SRF as the current head of media operations. She now dreams to become a

Minster of Information in a European country, or maybe Canada, because she says, there, anyone can be anything, one does not have to be born and be from the place to become something. As the flow of income increases with multiple family members working, they are returning to a life that she remembers, and with her graduation looming in the near future, she has once again assembled a different mode of living- perhaps, she is mimicking that survival tactics that have become innate, an innateness that began with her grandparents and lived on through her. ~~can displacement be hereditary?~~

Borrowed from a Mahmoud Darwish poem⁴, the question my thesis's title posits stems from an uncertain assemblage of being. Here, exile has become a state of permanence, a rupture from what was deemed stable, what was deemed home, country, self. The stories I wrote each ended with this permanent rupture, and Leila, Adnan, and Lama express moments with which the reality of what they've experienced set in; thus, when Darwish asks, *who am I without exile*, he opens up the space to ask what becomes of the self in unpredictable conditions, in a precarity brought on from displacement, and manifested in the ways everyday life and power is negotiated, be it in terms of paperwork, in terms of memory, or in terms of self-configuration. These stories invite us to attempt to analyze what is life in the moment, when all that surrounds one is the sea, or the bodies of loved ones, or echos of past displacements manifesting themselves in new ones? I remember recounting bits of Leila's story to Dr. Martina Rieker, my advisor, who commented, "*theorizing from the boat*". What does it mean when one begins shedding their understanding of themselves with each wave that

⁴ Complete text of the poem, *Who Am I Without Exile*, can be found in the annex.

crashes against the boat? In the middle of the sea, one sees no borders, no passport control, no country- only the uncertain harsh promise of tomorrow.

Chapter 1- Introduction

*“There’s nothing left of me but you, and nothing left of you but me”
- Mahmoud Darwish, The Butterfly’s Burden, 2007*

*“Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Suddenly, they become the bleached
bones of a story.”
-Arundhati Roy, The God of Small Things (2008: 16)*

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I was invited to a dinner party by Laith, a caseworker at Syria Relief Foundation (SRF)’s house. This dinner was a goodbye dinner for Laith’s mother, combined with a congratulatory dinner dedicated to his successful graduation with high honors. His mother was visiting from Aleppo, after not seeing Laith for five years, and was set to return (at?) the end of the week. She had wanted to get a residency permit, but due to the long bureaucratic process and the uncertainty of the return, she decided she would rather return to her young son back home. It was hosted at her sister’s house, who has been married to her Egyptian husband for 25 years. As the introductions went around, everyone introduced themselves, and where they were from in Syria or Egypt. As we went around, you heard “Homs”, “Halab”, “Sham”, “Rural Damascus”, “Deir Al Zour”, and “Daraa”. I had already introduced myself earlier, or rather was introduced as “Banan: Egyptian, Amreekya [hailing from the United States], and Bahraini; doing her master’s program here in the American University of Cairo”- this roundup is always said with a smile in the voice of the person presenting me, because it is accompanied with confusion about my “interesting” familial mix, as well as questioning my “absurd” choice of coming to Egypt to do an MA when I have institutions back “home” in the United States. After we did our rounds, our Egyptian host, as a way to acknowledge and welcome us all to his home, concluded with *“kol Soreya wahed (all of Syria is one)”*. As the night wore on, jokes of all the different cultural stereotypes linked with

the different geographical places in Syria were brought up, linking specific actions and traits to the area- “this Homs is doing this”, “you’re only saying this because you’re Halabi”. As the conversation turned, the revolution’s [I use the term revolution, because that is how it is talked about within the circle- as a “thawra”] anniversary became a point of tension and conflict. Yaman, a former SRF staffer from Homs, nudged me to ask the group when the start of the revolution was, and immediately everyone tensed up. Those from Daraa were insistent that the protests began on the 18th of March, 2011, while the rest of the group were either silent or discussing how it was actually 15th of March. This point of difference was not denying that protests took place, but rather, how the revolution was manifested either through the violence and death that happened on the 18th, or the beginning cries of regime change that started on the 15th. Regardless, it became a point of tension, and to quickly ease it, Yaman ended it with “*Kol ‘aam wa ahl daryaa bekhier [May every year be blessed on the people of Daryaa]*”. Our Egyptian host, who was silent until this point, chipped in and said “*Kol ‘aam we ahl Sorya kolha bkhier [May every year be blessed on all of the people of Syria]*”. We parted ways soon after another heated discussion about the legitimacy of the revolution took place, and whether it should have even happened in the first place, shifting from a temporal point of contestation to a generational one, between the older hosts and the younger guests; soon after, I returned home while the rest of the group continued their night at a café before they all departed to the different areas of Cairo they all live in, most to 6th of October, some to Faisal, others to Rehab. Things are not always as they seem, it seems.

This story and the others referenced throughout the thesis opens up the space for an emergence of questions and inquiries that push back against attempts to categorize, to order and understand a neatly packaged and easily dissectible narrative. A narrative created and

driven by demographics and set geographical areas (similar to what seemed to be the case in every international NGO meeting I attended, or even how the Egyptian uncle would summarize the complexity of the gathering with the idea of a unitized, universal understanding of what Syria and Syrian-ness is). Rather, as I became more attuned to this contradiction between the hegemonic narrative that is derived from the very act of category making, more fluid dynamics that closely matched the ebb and flow of the everyday emerged, particularly in the individual subjectivities I observed in the relationships I formed, where even the date of a particular event resulted in heated debates surrounding the need to define what the revolution is in order to set one's timer to "the beginning". This thesis thus seeks to ask: how do Syrians negotiate these fluid dynamics? How is their everyday shaped by their movement, and what does that mean in relation to how they deal with the various sovereignties in one place? What does it mean to *be Syrian* in Egypt- how does being Syrian get re/de-assembled in their navigation of their everyday? What layers and traces emerge to complicate the hegemonic understanding of what it means to be a Syrian in an era where Syrian is automatically seen as synonymous and interchangeable with refugee?

Traces of these questions began materializing through the interactions and observations I had with my Syrian friends, many of whom I met through SRF. SRF established itself as an official organization (meaning recognized and registered in the Ministry of Social Solidarity) in 2013, however, its roots can be traced back to the beginning of the 2011 Syrian conflict as a response to the first large stream of Syrians escaping the violence to Egypt. A group of Syrian students, mainly from Kasr Al Aini Medical School in Cairo, began organizing to locate housing and basic living necessities for the new Syrian arrivals. Using their networks, and capitalizing on the momentum of the Egyptian revolution to build solidarity lines, these

students were able to reach a great number of Syrians and as their work expanded, so did their reach. Most of these students were already in Egypt before, many of them, particularly the founders, were born and raised in the Gulf states, and hail from well to do families, where migration was not a new development in their lives, but rather a continuous element in their personal histories. Many of these students were also the children of mostly Syrian Islamist political exiles, and were very active in the pro-revolution political movements against Bashar Al Assad in Cairo.

With the passage of time, and the increase of Syrians coming into Egypt, the students realized the need to institutionalize their work, in order to maximize their reach, as well as simplify navigation of the Egyptian state. As a result, they established their main office, which then expanded to eleven implementation offices, spread out across Cairo in areas that had a large concentration of Syrians. At that time of SRF's inception, it had a very pronounced religious and revolutionary stance, and the religious upbringing of many of the members translated into the programming and the projects they implemented. However, with the June 30th 2013 events leading to the subsequent military takeover in Egypt, and with the societal xenophobic turn against Syrians, SRF halted all its work for a few months, due to fear of being targeted. By the time it reopened, it adopted a subdued and minimal public presence, expanding slowly, and due to the major exodus of Syrians that took place post-coup, opened limited offices. It was during this time period that I was introduced to SRF, as volunteer project implementer for a Muslim American organization using funding from a Syrian- American donor. The donor was related to a board member of SRF at that time. Since it was difficult to receive money from international sources as an Egyptian local organization, the US organization wired the funds through SRF's branch of France [the branch closed down]; the

funds were blocked due to the inclusion of “Syria” programs in the description. I add this to emphasis how, as a result of bureaucratic red tape and the duties of my role, what was supposed to be a short visit was extended. During that time, while waiting for the funds to be released, I assisted with program design, volunteered to organize educational trips for the students, and got acquainted with the social make-up of the organization, which offered, at that moment, a brief glimpse into how the community navigated, and articulated themselves in their everyday.

When I returned to Egypt to continue my graduate studies in June 2015, I naturally went back to SRF, as I had remained in contact with the founder and CEO, Omar, as well as a few people and began volunteering once more. Depending on my availability, my roles shifted within the organization, sometimes I was an event planner, other times, an event volunteer; and at some point, I also had a stint in the Board of Trustees before stepping down due to graduate school. However, I mostly, and quite bitterly (as I hate all form of mundane secretarial work) translated and wrote proposals, formulated emails, and transcribed videos. During that time, as my relationship with the organization’s staff members intensified, and expanded to include their kin and social networks, a more muddled idea of how they navigate the city emerged; an emergence that overturned my socialized assumptions of how displaced populations navigate their everyday- as well as pushed further attempts to analyze displaced populations. The people I met and formed relationships with, varied as much as their place of origin in Syria. As the story at the beginning of the chapter illustrates, many gatherings are punctuated with jokes about particular traits certain areas are stereotyped to have, and by humorously pitting districts against each other- Aleppo and Homs were the biggest victims in that regard. Their socioeconomic background varied as well, but most of the Syrians I met

comfortably self-define themselves as middle class; and even when they confide in me the particular ways they might not be, they still very much presented themselves as middle class. These moments usually took place during the mundane everyday tasks that I began joining them in, whether it was to accompany them to visits with school administrators, doctor's appointments, or keep them company as they sat waiting at the bank, or as we gathered to organize an SRF event.

Placing myself within these various assemblages is an important digression to make, as the way I was read in these circles was crucial to the types of information and observations I was able access. As I stated at the onset of the chapter, I am an Arab American of Egyptian and Bahraini decent. I was born and raised in New Jersey (NJ), a state known for its significant Arab, Desi, Latino, Black and Muslim population; growing up, it was always joked that driving through Jersey City (JC), NJ, a city an hour away from where I lived, felt like driving in Shubra Masr, a popular area in Cairo with a significant Coptic population (JC has the largest Coptic population in the USA). Growing up in such a diverse setting meant that our close family friends consisted of people from Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and North African countries. The impact of this exposure can be found mostly in my dialect, as I speak a mixture of a Levantine and Gulf dialects, as well as the Egyptian dialect. I believe it was my dialect that first gave me rapport within the foundation, as it sounded familiar, even if distinctly foreign. I was simply assumed to be from a different area of Syria, or an Iraqi who may have lived in Syria. I am always asked where I am from, with "Daraa" (a district close to the Jordanian border) and "Hasaka" (a district close at the Iraqi/ Syrian border) always the front running suggestions. My "non-Egyptian"-ness was brought up several times, particularly in times when discussion topics centered on being critical of Egypt and Egyptians. Whenever I bring up that I am

Egyptian, or part at least, it is always dismissed with a “but you're different”, or “I feel as though you are like us”.The familiarity did not end with my dialect, as my name, *Banan*, also places me in a very specific position- my mother named me after Banan Al Tantawi, the daughter of Ali Al Tantawi, a prominent Syrian Islamic scholar and the wife of Issam Al-Attar, the former leader the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood who spearheaded the Islamist uprising in Syria, which took place from 1976 to 1982. Banan was assassinated on July 1980 in Germany by Hafez Al Assad’s secret security services in a political ploy by the regime against her husband. Thus, my name, and my familiarity with its backstory when prompted to explain it, cast me as someone who understood and sympathized with the Syrian cause, and opened avenues of discussion that might not have taken place otherwise.

My role was also defined by my experience with SRF and its staffers in the beginning. When I first arrived in 2015, SRF was going through many transitions, and there was a disconnect between the staff and the administrators. I volunteered whatever experience I had to help in the restructuring of the organization, and consequently, found myself meeting with every single staff member separately, to hear their grievances and suggestions. As a result, I established a very personal relationship with almost every staff member, as every meeting would eventually veer off into an orchestrated interplay of questions to better acquaint ourselves with each other. We often communicated through WhatsApp and Facebook, and I was added to group chats and community groups that have proved to be crucial in supplementing the information I was hearing and observing. SRF proved critical to the information I later gathered, as my thesis became a group effort, and I was blessed with the enthusiastic support and comments I received throughout the writing process as a result of such an intricate and involved rapport.

Disrupting Syria: Regional Post-Revolutionary Movements

Militarized violence erupted soon after segments of the Syrian population took to the streets in March 2011, resulting in one of the most significant exoduses of recent history. As of March 2017, it is estimated that about 470,000 Syrians have been killed as a result of the conflict, and eleven million have been displaced (IAMSYRIA, 2017). Depending on where they were located geographically in Syria, those leaving travelled to the nearest neighboring country. Official UNHCR statistics have 4,810,710 Persons of Concern registered, mainly spread out over the neighboring countries to Syria, namely Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, with smaller numbers scattered all over North Africa (UNHCR, 2016). However, national statistics of the respective countries offer different numbers, and there are discrepancies with numbers depending on official institutions.

Broadly speaking, the Syrian experience has differed depending on which country they travelled to, with 490,621 Syrians encamped in Jordan and Turkey, resulting in the remaining population settling in rural and urban settings outside of the camps. While 80% of Syrians live in urban areas in Jordan, it still hosts Zaatari camp, one of the largest Syrian refugee camps. Those in the camps are not able to leave it, and those outside cannot visit their relatives inside, and thus these camps are enclosures that completely sever mobility. This is confounded by the fact that Jordan has completely shut its borders, and apart from very urgent situations, has made it very difficult for Syrians to enter. This is also coupled with the limited formal employment opportunities, resulting in most Syrian refugees becoming employed in the informal sector, making particular contributions to the textile economy.

Jordan, however, is seen as an easier destination when compared to the conditions of Syrians in Lebanon. Given Lebanon's delicate political, demographic and sectarian makeup,

which hangs on a thin string, policies and attitudes towards anything perceived to be a threat to this delicate balance are not friendly. Thus, there are no formal camps in Lebanon, and working without a permit is illegal; however, it is near impossible to get a permit approved by the Ministry of Labor (Arnaki & Kalis, 2016). In Iraq, Syrians mostly went to Kurdish controlled areas, and are hosted positively by the community, accessing their overburdened and underfunded schools and healthcare systems (KRG, 2016). Although initially many opt for urban settlement, once assistance and resources dry up, they are usually forced to accept the reality of living in Al-Qaim camp, where mobility is very restricted.

Syrians in Egypt offer an exceptional insight into how movement and refugeeness is navigated. Egypt does not have an encampment policy, and the Egyptian government does not directly interact with refugees or persons of concern, instead delegating the role to the UNHCR (Ayoub & Khallaf, 2014: 9). At the onset of the migration flow, “the first wave of Syrians fleeing to Egypt in 2011 were primarily composed of persons with family ties, business connections or personal networks in Egypt” (Joint Assessment, 2014: 8). Syrians began streaming into Egypt steadily with the corresponding violence in Syria, and as a result numbers peak and decrease given the political situation. Although Syrians have been arriving from the end of 2011, numbers reached their peak in April 2013 (Ayoub & Khallaf, 2014: 10). This was due to the open- door policy that Egypt had with Syria, visa approval was not required prior to arriving, facilitating the large flow. It was made possible by the extremely welcoming rhetoric under President Mohamed Morsi, who openly supported the Syrian revolution and severed ties with Bashar Al- Assad’s government. As a result, many anti-regime Syrians, with Islamist leanings also began streaming in, and actively organizing from Egypt.

It is difficult to discuss lives in terms of numbers, of lineal routes, and final destinations, and consequently, the overview I provided does not seek to be seen as valid, nor can I assure that it is. Numbers in of themselves do not mean much, they are arbitrary. Michal Agier writes on the institutionalization of numbers by describing them as, “so often approximate and contradictory, and sometimes quite imaginary ... produced in order to quantify these categories, and whose fluctuation essentially derive from changes in identification they depend on institutions that count and recount categories of individuals at same time as they name and rename them” (2011: 6-7). As a result, it is nonsensical to attempt to understand, and comprehend the flow of the movements, through an approach that relies on comprehensive overviews of statistics, as it seeks to present a certain stable and solid visibility that my thesis seeks to unhinge. By evoking the numbers, and the experiences and policies Syrians deal with in different geographical areas, I simply want to illustrate the extent of the Syrian diaspora (while still acknowledging the extreme difficulty and impossibility in doing so), in an attempt to provide a context of the overall regional response to the waves of people entering I also found it pertinent to provide an overview of the regional reactions to the flow of Syrians in their countries, not as a comparison, as each country has its own complicated history with migration movements and flow, but rather as a context to view Egypt with. It provides a bit of understanding to why, perhaps, both Lama and Leila’s families, whose stories preface this thesis, decided after looking at their options, that Egypt was the most suitable choice.

Historicizing Syrian Migration to Egypt

To understand the multiplicity of the Syrian social in Egypt, an understanding of the historical foundations of the community is a crucial juncture- Syrians have always been coming in and out of Egypt. By first conceding that that this particular flow of Syrians,

propelled by massive displacement and the revolution, is a rupture of the fluid flows that existed before, a retrospective “look back” paints an image in which Egypt has always been an absorber of intellectual-, economic, and religious migration from the Levant, gaining prominence in the Ottoman time period. The short lived United Arab Republic, which saw the unity of Egypt and Syria between 1958 and 1961, provided a “brief heyday” of connected migration, but was cut short by with Gamal Abdelnasser’s nationalization and socialist measures. This resulted in what Marius Deeb describes as, a departure due to “Nasser's undermining of free enterprise and freedom” (1989: 146). Yet, in the years leading to the 2011 revolution, significant businesses began establishing themselves in Egypt, particularly in the textile economy, the Samakia Brothers enterprises the Cottonil and Embrator , spearheading the textile economy, as they are the most popular Egyptian cotton brands.

Understanding these foundations provides some insight into the places of settlement that Syrians have settled in. Following Syrian capital, as well as paralleling the new expansions of Cairo, many Syrians have settled in the suburbs and governorates surrounding Cairo. One major settlement can be seen in the 6th of October, which has been dubbed “Little Damascus”, due to the extensive Syrian businesses and families who live there. Al Oubur and the 10th Of Ramadan, closer to New Cairo, also have extensive populations due to the presence of significant textile factories in these areas. Accordingly, the latest United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report places Syrian contribution to the Egyptian economy at 800 million dollars, with the actual numbers believed to be higher, as not all Syrian businesses are registered (2017: 91), showing contributions to include “large factories and micro-enterprises in diverse sectors—e.g., textiles, restaurants, local markets and IT firms” (ibid). It is within these various segments, and geographies, that I travelled and engaged with in my field work.

Rupturing the Binary of Migration: Deconstructing Refugeeness

Casting an introspective look at conditions, fluxes, and flows that complicate the usage of categorizing terms such as refugeeness, displacement, forced migration arbitrarily is critical, as it is with these borders that the narrative around the Syrian community is produced, and deconstructing it allows for a deeper look as to the motives behind the need to label. It is also imperative that the study in which labeling and categorization takes place is rooted in a comprehensive understanding of migration. Here, I find digressing to Thomas Nail's book, *The Figure of the Migrant* (2015), useful, as it looks at the fluidity of both migration and migrants. Nail asserts traditional modes of theorizing migration stems from a static understanding of it, viewing it in a spatiotemporal sense that exists between this binary of "a point of departure (A), and passing, via translation, to a place of arrival (B)" (2015, 11). Nail invites us to view migration, rather, in multiplicity, as hybrid layers of socially produced movements. This hybridity is predicated on the idea that the migrant is "not a "type of person", or fixed identity, but a mobile social position or spectrum that people move into and out of under certain social conditions of mobility (ibid, 235). Similarly, in their book, *Escape Routes* (2008), Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos, invoke us to view migration as "a constitute creative force which fuels social, cultural and economic transformations" (xviii), this force, or *autonomy of migration*, breaks away from a similar vantage point as Nail, by contending that "conceiving migrational movements as derivatives of social, cultural, and economic structures" limits the description of multiplicity and fluidity. This mobile force is created by the actors that navigate within it, and accordingly, center the premise of Nail's book. With this evocation, migration may thus also be defined as social conditions or regimes of motion within which different types of migratory figures emerge and coexist" (2015, 15). Nail begins with the

assertion that the figure of the migrant is a political figure, one that is varied and made mobile via a vie expulsion from a regime that expelled - be it the nomad, expelled from land, or the barbarian expelled from politics, or the vagabond, expelled by law (ibid). This etches at a very essential understanding of migration, and one that is enunciated by Papadopoulos, et al, who state, “migration has been and continues to be a constituent force in the formation of sovereignty (2008: 202). Thus, one cannot speak of the figure of the migrant or migration, without unpacking first the essential understanding with which migration studies tethers itself.

Ilana Feldman (2008), in her work on Palestine, grapples with the notion of sovereignty in the context of a lack of a recognized state. Defining sovereignty through a numerical list as “ (1) sovereignty as a means of mediating relations between states and (2) sovereignty as a mechanism for managing bonds between the governor and the governed” (449), she invites us to see the underlying premise of sovereignty: recognition. Thus, a sovereign is not only recognized, but also recognizes the stratification of inclusion and exclusion- the citizen, and non-citizen. It is with this premise that prominent philosophers (Benjamin, Arndt, Agamben) theorize those rendered outside, rendered bare. One cannot mention Syrians in an academic discussion without the conversation automatically being discussed from the lens of refugeeness. While my thesis attempts to tackle/undo this notion of refugee as a stable category, by arguing that that it is one of the many tactics Syrians use to navigate their everyday, I still find that in order to complicate/defect from this, an overview of the discussions surrounding refugees, and the genealogy behind the term is necessary. It is no surprise that the most influential, and foundational, thinkers about expulsion and refugeeness are Walter Benjamin and Hannah Arendt- both having suffered under the Nazi regimes that expelled

them. This expulsion led to Benjamin's death at the Spanish border as he attempted to escape the atrocities, and Hannah Arendt's eighteen years of pariahness, or as she describes, a state in which one is "dismissed by contemporary society as a nobody" (1944: 114) — a state of being which ended with her being granted the American citizenship.

Benjamin writes, "there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism", and one can debate what encompasses document of civilization, is it the border, or is it the paper with which you are recognized by the sovereign? Regardless, however, whether a document of civilization or a document of barbarism, the power in this "document" lies in its demarcating ability to note who is allowed inside, and who is made to remain on the outside- the exception. Building on this state of exception from Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* takes shape. *Homo sacer* builds on the Ancient Greek division of life, one that is *bios* (political life), and *zoe* (naked life), the former indicating what today might be understood as citizenship, while the latter indicates the human outside of the "state"- with no political participation. *Homo sacer*, thus, is when the sovereign forces *bios* into the zone of *zoe*, rendering the *homo sacer* killable by all (Agamben, 2000: 19-20). A modern reconfiguration of this is exile, expulsion, and as Agamben discusses, refugee camps. *Homo sacer* is the bio-political result of sovereignty, which creates "subjects who can be abandoned by the state, whose exclusion defines sovereign power" (Schueller, 2009:241). The refugee, according to Agamben, thus emerges from this rejection, as the nexus of power lies within and begins at the sovereign. It is the sovereign that determines social and political life; to accept the sovereign, one accepts the complete subjection to the sovereign's power of death in their lives. Yet, refugees, in their exceptional zones, unmask the very relationship between the sovereign and the body, and camps, as a bi-product of such revelations, thus became spaces in which

“the state of exception is permanently realized” (Agamben, 2000: 39). Agamben, through his theorizing of this relationship opened up spaces with which different configurations of the exception can be theorized; however, other scholars, like Nadia Latif (2008), whose works focuses on refugee subjectivity and the making of refugees, finds this line of thinking limiting in the ways such subjectivity of is formed. She identifies this limitation as stemming from a fundamental misreading of Foucault’s conceptualization of power, explaining:

Power in Foucault’s conceptualization has no single locus or center (1990, 92–102). Power flows along and is immanent in social relations of class, gender, age, sexuality, kinship, economic production, citizenship, and so forth. Hence, any subjectivity is formed at the nexus of different intersecting power-laden social relationships. Such an understanding places law and the state squarely within the realm of the social. For Agamben, on the other hand, power is conceptualized as residing solely within the sovereign, whether despot, tyrant, monarch, dictator, or the modern democratic state (1995, 1–29). The sovereign is seen as exercising power in a constant, ever-intensifying attempt to strip those within its continuously expanding realm to bare life. Such as conceptualization, as well as the sharp dichotomy posited between the wielder of power and the one upon whom it is wielded, indicates the presumption of a complete absence of the social, in which case its analytic utility is cast into doubt. (Latif, 2008: 265)

Thus, Latif’s focus on shifting the nexus of power from the sovereign to the social, calls for a critical look at the the ways in which subjectivity is formed within the embedded practices of constitutive powers and its navigation, particularly humanitarian organizations and governance. Here, Michel Agier’s ethnography, *Managing the Undesirables* (2007), makes a useful interjection through his attempts to analyze how the sovereign governs camps, as the line between the state and humanitarian organizations administrating the camps is blurred. While Egypt does not have any camps, besides the short-lived Salloum camp (2011) on the Libyan border, it does delegate the administration tasks of refugee and displaced populations to the UNHCR. This is a significant point, emphasized by the protests in September 2005 in which Sudanese refugees staged a sit in to object UNHCR’s decision to “voluntarily” repatriate

them. After negotiations did not go anywhere, UNHCR sought help from the Egyptian government to disperse them, resulting in a massacre that took the lives of about 27 or over 150, depending on who you asked (Agier, 2007: 13) This incident, while horrific, exemplifies how the role of the UNHCR has emerged to perform as a disciplinary institution in the lives of the displaced, and emphasizes the blurred lines Agier unpacks in his work.

Thus, the complexity with the blurred lines muddies the understanding of bare life as a binary between state and body, and as a result, while I find both Agamben and Latif's interjections useful when theorizing modes of inclusion and exclusion, I digress by arguing in this thesis, that the observations and conversations I have had push for different ways in which the exception can be theorized; I am not arguing that the exception does not exist, but rather, that I find Veena Das and Deborah Poole's interjection, in their volume, *The State and Its Margins* (2004), useful: "understanding of bare life... as sites that do not so much lie outside the state- but rather, like rivers, run through its body" (13). Agamben's work emerges with a rights-based binary of citizens and non-citizen, which is useful when attempting to analyze the ways in which a state's writing practices creates such categories, however falls short in allowing room for other trajectories that fall outside this binary. Aiwā Ong, in her book "*Neoliberalism as Exception*" (2006) argues that with this "rigid binary opposition", Agamben "ignores the possibility of complex negotiations of claims for those without territorialized citizenship"(23). These rivers provide space for new reconfigurations and meanings to articulate what *makes* the category of a refugee, particularly in instances when the neat understanding of refugeeness is unhinged.

The binary of citizen and the non-citizen refugee also contextualizes why most research in Egypt that focuses on displacement and refugeeness is usually policy oriented,

with a heavy emphasis on the role of UNHCR and its subsidiary NGOS. Maysa Ayoub and Shaden Khallaf's (2014) research, *Syrian Refugees in Egypt: Challenges of a Politically Changing Environment*, is a prime example of that. Funded by the UNHCR, the study endeavored to provide an empirical understanding of Syrian refugees in Egypt. It attempted to study the impact of changing policies on the Syrian population, but begins and ends within the locus of the UNHCR, and its definition, and begins with the classified/labeled Syrian-whom they identify as refugees. It was a useful methodology for their research, and articulates the ways in which the UNHCR also analyzes and frames the population- through numbers and neat categories. While their usage of numbers proved useful in my attempts to provide background information on Syrians in Egypt, I found the straight forward approach resulted in neat answers, useful for project development and planning; but not true to the ebb and flow that flowed around me as I began my research. Similarly, Nadine Elshokeiry's (2016) working paper on the refugee response in Egypt also engages with the public policy and administration perspective of Syrian refugees in Egypt. I find, however, that research on more established communities proves to be more useful, as they begin looking at the engagement of the everyday ethnographically, which allows for a different narrative to emerge. Anita Fabos's (2015) research, for example, on "Microbuses and Mobile Homemaking in Exile: Sudanese Visiting Strategies in Cairo", looks not only at how home is constructed through a state centered perspective (perpetuated by the various policies of the Egyptian government, international NGOs, and local NGOS), but also how Sudanese visiting and transportation practices contribute to this idea of "home".

Mutations at the Margins: Overlapping & Fragmented Modes of Sovereignty

One way in which the self configures is found in the assemblage of the practices in which they recognize power- namely, the state. The modern state, as Ferguson and Gupta (2002) emphasize, is “not simply functional bureaucratic apparatuses, but powerful sites of symbolic and cultural production that are in of themselves always culturally represented and understood in particular ways” (982). Thus, when the state itself is imagined, it opens up the possibilities to see that ways in which the “spatialization of the state” or the mundane and everyday methods states utilize to produce the image around its governing powers. Ferguson and Gupta invite us to look at look at the reworking of the institutions in relationship to the mundane, unmarked, signifying practices of the everyday by moving away from the images of verticality and encompassment pervading academic discourse on the state. The former predicated on the formation of the state as a top down institution, whereas the latter looks at the enmeshment of the nation with the state- namely how “the state... is included in an ever-widening series of circles that begins with family and local community, and ends with the system of nation states” (ibid). This spatialization, as Daas and Poole argue, can best be read in the margins of the state, “places where state law and order continually have to reestablished... something best seen what one moves away from the “center” (Asad, 2004: 279). These margins can be approached through three concepts, as Talal Asad re-articulates: “first, as peripheries or territories in which the state has yet to penetrate; second, as ‘spaces forms and practices through which the state is continually both experienced and undone through the *illegibility* of its own practices, documents, and words, and finally as the space between bodies, law, and discipline” (2004: 9-10; 279). The margin, defined as such, can then be seen not as an amalgamation with the exception, but rather, a place that is mobile, inhibiting both the center

and the periphery through everyday practices (Daas, Poole, 2004: 29). As such, it is useful to see how the modern state is constructed through its writing practices, the “documentary and statistics gathering practices of the state are all intended, in some sense, to consolidate state control over subjects, populations, and territories, and lives” (ibid,9). By constructing the state margins around how such practices configure in illegible ways, Daas and Poole speak the state’s contradictory practices, which open spaces for which “economies of displacement, falsification, and interpretation surrounding the circulation and use of personal identification papers” (ibid, 10). Paperwork, then, becomes a state practice from which demarcations of inclusion and exclusion are variously constructed, and helps develop an understanding of the ways in which these processes are made and experienced in the Syrian everyday in Cairo.

These demarcations are crucial to understanding how power’s writing practices pave the way for a constant process of categorization. Here, I find useful to juncture to Evelyn Ruppert (2012), whose working on categories that emerge from census taking procedures illuminates not only how states attempt to categorize, to identify and catalog (38), but also how subjects are also involved in the process of “double identification”, in which they also begin to formulate themselves alongside the state’s established categories. On the other hand, the state also depends on the subjects to identify as part of a collective, to use semantics that fit within the acceptable realm, to identify themselves- hence this system depends on both dance partners to accept it in order for it to work. That is not to say that there are no acts of refusal within this process, on the contrary, Ruppert writes, “agents can and so refuse identification with authoritative categories and claim different ones than those circulated by the state. They also can and do obfuscate and misreport their identification and use identification as a tactical resource. As such, census taking is not only a subjectifying technology, but also a

strategy” (2012: 40). Hence, the use of categorization, and the fluidity of such a process, is crucial in attempts to understand how the *Syrian*, as a category, is captured and reconfigured.

Thus, by establishing contradiction as the springboard and foundation, one can return to looking at how state practices as contradictory and illegible transform the “monolith” state and the “singular” sovereign into a more fluid structure, and a new muddled understanding emerges; one that Ong explains as a sovereignty that is “manifested in multiple, often contradictory strategies that encounter diverse claims and contestations, and produce diverse and contingent outcomes” (7). This thus opens the way for a multiplicity in the way states are configured and negotiated, paving the way for new modalities to emerge that unhinge the image of a “political singularity”. Rather, Ong urges to look at the ways new forms of neoliberal governmentality rupture this singularity by creating “differently administered spaces... an emergent situation of *overlapping sovereignties* [emphasis added]”(7). These overlapping sovereignties can be “conceptualized as a new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are recast as nonpolitical and non-ideological problems that need technical solutions” (3). These new forms can be seen in the new market-driven strategies that encompass both corporations and NGO’s- the latter of which plays a significant role in my thesis, and can also be read as “a new modality of government” (989), as Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue, absorbing the outsourcing of state functions (990). This outsourcing manifests itself in the various fragmented faces of power that Syrians deal with in their everyday, and in this thesis functions in the particular dynamic that emerge within the interactions in the ngo-sphere. Academics have reflected, and made important interventions, into the ways in which ngo-ization has permeated and muddled the understanding and workings of the state and opened for new configurations of governmentality and power,

particularly in the realm of refugee studies (for example, Jad 2007, Hardt and Negri 2000, Maalki 1996, Agier 2011). For the sake of this thesis, I address ngo-ization not through the process itself, but rather the navigation of such processes from the lived experiences of those at SRF. It analyzes: how do such categorizations and juxtapositions serve as modes of existence and navigation for them? This thesis is as much about state practices as it is about navigation of such practices- what reconfigurations of the self emerge within this nexus of relationships in which each factor or side is made and remade to adjust to the flow of the contradictory practices they live in?

Memory and Imagination : Undoing the Hegemonic

Memory is active. Active in the sense that it is constantly being reconstructed in the “most minute and everyday details of our lives” (Benjamin, 1999: 255). Walter Benjamin discusses how memory and remembrance are difficult attempts to extract the past from the present, “not simply because present factors tend to influence- some might say distort- our recollections of the past but also because past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the present (ibid). Memory nonetheless discusses a moment, a flash that articulates itself in its beholders’ articulation of self, and as a result, functions as a juncture between the past and the present. (ibid). Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) builds upon this notion, suggesting that instead of looking at the past as something that is a separate body from the present, we should how “the past does not exist independently from the present... indeed, the past is only past because there is a present, just as I can point to something over there only because I am here. But nothing is inherently over there or here... in that sense, the past has no content. The past -- or more accurately, pastness -- is a position” (15). This point is necessary to

make in order to understand the ways in which the past- or the understanding of the past- intertwines with the everyday lives of the Syrian community in Egypt. Memory is not only a personal act, it is political. Political because in the often times in the individual act of vocalizing memory that stems from a collective that places memory in a hegemonic narrative; to unpack how societies remember, Paul Connerton evoking Martin Halbwachs, says, begins by understanding that the process does not separate the two- because “idea of individual memory, absolutely separate from social memory, is an abstraction devoid of meaning”(37). Halbwachs writes,

“our recollections, each taken in itself, belong to everybody; but the coherence, or arrangement of our recollections belongs only to ourselves- we alone are capable of knowing and them to mind. ... does the society that helps us understand and call to mind the recollection of an object also not intervene- and must not it intervene- to allow us to understand and call to mind this arrangement of objects that constitutes a complete picture or an event in its totality? (1992: 171).

How this manifests in the private and public spheres is very much determined not only by the bodies that think it, but also is very much part of the social processes that create it (Radstone, Schwarz, 2010: 3). Memory in the everyday is shaped by the various individuated assemblages, and thus is configured in the social as much the personal. As such, by “using the medium of memory” as Sussannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz invoke us to do, an analytical frame is offered with which we can see “the possibility not only that an element of selfhood can be reconstituted, but also that a public, political language can be fashioned in which these experiences, and others like them, can be communicated to others” (ibid, 3) How Syria is remembered is very much coached in a classed, gendered, and religious affiliation process, amongst other minute factors that determine how it is remembered. How Syria is remembered by someone from Hama, which was targeted by the Nizam (Assad regime) in the 1980’s, is different from how someone hailing from the oldest merchant families in Aleppo remembers

Syria. “Narratives of the past”, Brian Roberts (2004), writes, “are written in the situation, experiences and interpretations of the present, and may also reflect an imagined future and considerations of action” (99). Thus, how the past is nostalgically remembered hues their present navigation, and is a foundational marker that they center themselves with, and is the point where I springboard to understand the various contradictions that emerge in the process of remembering.

Constellations of Everyday Lives and Crisis: Strategies of Survival

“Crises, by definition, involve, conditions in which people (including states agents) must improvise with the elements of their social and political technologies and cope with a variety of unexpected disruptions and opportunities (Greenhouse, Wertz, Warren, 2002:9). These improvisations, or tactics, can be seen in the way actions are a “constant state of reassessment and correction, based directly on observations of the actual environment” (Goff: 2004). Tactics, a concept Michel de Certeau, in his work, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), writes extensively on, “depends on time- it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing’...it must constantly manipulate events ... the intellectual synthesis of these given elements takes the form, however, not of a discourse, but of the decision itself, the act and manner in which the opportunity is ‘seized’” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 17). These everyday decisions can be seen as forms of resistance to the systems one encounters, can be seen in the ways in which screens are used to subvert the pervasive structures one inhibits to navigate their everyday. Screens, as theorized by Abdoumalig Simone (2012) begins by first defining mobility, as a “series of discontinuous events whereby assumptions, histories, and everyday enactments are dislocated and rearranged” (2012:202). As a result, this rearrangement requires the people to “step in and out of various ‘shells’ of operations- i.e. various enfolded

identities” (ibid, 203). These shells of operations are later articulated by Simone as screens, which can be seen as “different ways of being in the city” (ibid, 209), as “invisible supplements to everyday scenarios...that choreograph specific spacing of bodies, materials, and things (ibid, 210). The usage of screen as a “tactic” to navigate everyday life can be directly linked with the way screens are used to protect, conceal or reveal based on the moment. Another such tactic, which might not give the impression of a tactic, is waiting. Analyzing waiting, as Ghassan Hage (2009) describes, opens up spaces for which inquires around the different kinds of waiting that emerges in the very act of waiting: “There is a politics around who is to wait. There is a politics around what waiting entails. And there is a politics around how to wait and how to organize waiting into a social system” (2). This is particularly important when analyzing the various ways Syrians wait in their everyday- waiting for residency permits, waiting/not waiting for Syria, waiting for funding from donors, waiting for victory, and waiting for tomorrow. In this thesis, I will expand on Ghassan Hage’s conceptualization of waiting to include Javier Ayuero’s work on the ways in which waiting is also utilized by state bureaucratic processes to establish modes of waiting that directly correlates with Hage’s questions- different people are made to wait different ways.

To better fathom the everyday using these configurations, I find Kathleen Stewart’s ordinary affect useful. She begins by seeing “the ordinary [as] a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion” (2007: 1). These shifting assemblages are “trajectories and circuits” (ibid, 11), that “trace how the potency of forces lies in their immanence to things that are both flighty and hard-wired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too (ibid). This palpability lies in the nature of the everyday moment, the ordinary, that dwelling in a place produces. Stewart straightforwardly states, “ideologies

happen. Power snaps into place. Structures grow entrenched. Identities take place. Ways of knowing become habitual at the drop of a hat. But it's ordinary affects that give things the quality of a something to inhabit and animate (ibid, 15). Thus, by looking at ordinary affects as something that can be traced, and is constantly becoming, the fluidity which encompasses the everyday of the particular Syrian social I observed, can be seen in the very tactics, screens and modes of waiting that they inhabited. Consequently, the everyday becomes configured into something that is no longer mundane and routine, but is in actuality a canvas that is constantly being repainted with new techniques and materials. Here, I find a digression to Papadopoulos, et al. (2008) concept of escape routes a significantly useful frame from which to encompass tactics, screens, and ordinary affects. Escape routes emerge when social transformation is assessed from the everyday lives of those deemed insignificant in a grand narrative of revolutionary, explosive change. Hence, escape routes are simply, or perhaps not simply, "moments where people subvert their existing situations without naming their practice (or having it named) as subversion" (xiii). As such, these moments open up spaces that allow for attempts to critically engage with the mess of everyday life.

Of Methods and Methodology: Unpacking the Mess

This thesis examines the particular ways different groups of Syrians navigate the city of Cairo. I hope to complicate the hegemonic narrative of the Syrian refugee, to question the categorizations that emerge in imaginations of the precarious, and discuss the complex relationship between the individual and the sovereign, or as my research hopes to shed light on, the faces of the multiple sovereignties. It is particularly important for me that I acknowledge that the production process is rooted in individual subjectivities that shape and is

shaped not only by the subjects, but also the researcher (Nagar 2015). Richa Nagar discusses how it is imperative on knowledge producers to turn the gaze on themselves- asserting that any complex feminist engagement must have a self-reflexivity that is attuned to time, place, socio-political and cultural specifics. An understanding of “who are we [knowledge producers] writing for? In what way, and why?” is vital in having a solid ground in co-producing knowledge. Nagar builds on Mignolo’s (2012) method of conversation as a research method, of stories now becoming the new form of truth telling. Thus, the various ways in which the people would recall, or tell stories of not only their “arrival” moment, but of their recollections, of their commutes, of their waiting processes, all proved to be crucial and critical in how the tapestry of research has been weaved. The way Leila, for example, would oftentimes precede her stories with a feigned surprise of “*ma sem’etey alqesah? (you didn’t hear the story?)*” before she went on to retell me the “story” of her experiences, allowed for a certain capturing of everyday experience; yet one that can still be framed within the realm of the transcendental- stories and the act of speaking them invite for a reconfiguring and analysis in ways that interviews or personal observations fall short on.

A critical concept Nagar discusses is the idea of “full accessibility”- the responsibility of the knowledge producer to understand the politics surrounding specific research sites and the understanding that some places must be left alone- no one has the right to have full access to anything; not everything needs to be understood, deconstructed, dissected, or reported. As a researcher, I adopted these inclusive research methods and attempted to work with the messiness of how the field works, without following any clearly defined formula, but rather by attempting to always question my questions, focus on details as a focus to on how it actively speaks to the everyday. As this thesis is as much an ethnographic of state practices as it is of the

self and subjectivity, I adopt a methodology that attempts to explore “the zones (literally, and figuratively) where people are entangled, abandoned, engaged, and altered by the reconfiguration of the state” (Greenhouse, et al 2002:4).

These entanglements emphasize the messiness that I realized when I began analyzing my field notes. John Law (2004) argues that when social science attempts to describe things that are complex, it tends to make a mess of it (2) because the world around us is a “tide, flux, and [has] general unpredictability” (7). It is important to embrace the unknown as one that is constantly in motion- and that a researcher might not be able to comprehend the entirety of a field, by “knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight...techniques of deliberate imprecision” (Law, 2004: 3). Law (ibid) suggests that a better approach to methodology would be adapting “method assemblage”- the idea of embracing research as a “reality detector and reality amplifier”-meaning it detects patterns and relationships, and sheds light on them, rather than attempting to analyze the entirety of an issue (14). Greatness exists in the mundane details (Law & Linch, 2005: 299), and rather than attempting to grasp full representations, authoritative similarities and difference emerge to emphasize the mess of the everyday (p. 282).

Thus, I based my methodology in the overlapping malleability that Nagar, Mingolo, and Law’s concepts give room for, and used it as a foundation with which I not only conducted my ethnographic work, but also as a way to center my analysis. I entered the field as a volunteer for SRF, beginning my research in the summer of 2017, and have, through the relationships formed, been able to expand my initial reach to observe and participate in the everyday lives of the SRF staffers and their families. I stayed in Cairo, as well as Greater Cairo, and many of the conversations, anecdotes, and interviews took place in the context of SRF, its

events, and personal social meetings. With that in mind, my thesis seeks to understand how this particular Syrian social deals with the multiplicity that manifests in their everyday lives, what are the various screens and tactics they use to circumvent the fragmented sovereignties , particularly in the ways they broker legality through paperwork (Chapter 2), through particular transformation story of Syria Relief Foundation (Chapter 3) and through understanding and unpacking of hegemonic imagination and memory (Chapter 4). By tracing the shifts in the way the Syrian experience is constantly assembled and reassembled, an understanding of the way these shifts manifest/ negotiate themselves vis-à -vie the dialectical relationship between the self and power, emerges.

Chapter 2- Brokering Legality: The Mess of Paperwork

The perceived thread that holds the modern social together is the ability to be recognized as part of the social via legal paperwork. Hence, the abundance of paperwork and the ways one must transverse the various processes to be considered “legal” leads to constantly new configurations of the self. When I think of paperwork and the various mechanisms surrounding it in Egypt, I immediately think of SRF’s vice president, Bassem,. He is quite vocal about his displeasures with the system, as he has to go to the Mogamma, the government building in Tahrir Square where one goes to complete all government paperwork, on an almost weekly basis to ask after case number this or case number that, since he manages his entire family’s paperwork portfolio. It is through conversations with Bassem, as well others at SRF, that I have noticed a decided shift in the way the Egyptian government deals with the Syrian “category” and Syrian residency permit. As the procedures change and fluctuate on an almost weekly basis, I began taking note of the conversations on social media and in gatherings that spoke of the implementation of increasingly difficult policies, making it the task of receiving any sort of paperwork outside of the UNHCR an onerous one. This shift became increasingly prominent in the post- pound flotation era (November 2016), which is expanded on later in the chapter. This chapter analyzes these shifts’ impact on the emerging configurations of self, by tracing not only on how various Syrians arrived in Cairo, but also the ways they seek to “broker legality” in the processes surrounding paperwork, and the tactics they deploy to reassess and reconfigure themselves, using screens, to navigate such systems. These screens, to recall Simone, do not exist in vacuums, but rather the individual subjectivities are “constituted materially, and culturally, and mediated by social relations, difference and politics” (Ramamurthy, 2003: 528). This process, which Priti Ramamurthy calls

“perplexity,” is a “way of marking the tension between overlap, opposing, asymmetric forces or fields of power” (ibid: 525). The overlapping tensions are where I derive the understandings of how and when the screens are deployed.

Paperwork, in its essence, symbolizes the procedures with which one is determined to be within the fold of recognition, of life, or whether s/he would live a life in the margin, *sans-papiers*. It is in these writing practices that the modern state takes shape, and attempts to create a binary of legibility and illegibility emerge- yet what happens when the state-making itself is constituted by contradictory practices that manifest themselves in bureaucratic engagement? (Daas, Poole, 2004: 9) This bureaucratic engagement is represented through the various fragments with which the Syrian social interacts with; it is the crisis mode with which they adapt. Interactions with such fragments are colored by the various ways different bodies shift and reassemble according to the tides with which they are dealing. What does it mean to be a subject to a state when you deal with five different entities simultaneously- when attempting to use the state’s category-making ways to your benefits, and rejecting and accepting it depending on the need and usage. This chapter seeks to trace the notions of legality and categorizations, and how the attempts to remain or refuse to remain within the fold of the state can be manifested, contextualizing the major junctures that directly impact the ways in which the Syrian category needed to adjust itself, as well as reassess how they engage with these “fragmented” or “multiple” sovereignties.

“Kil She Etghayar [Everything Changed]”: Uncertainties in Crisis

One cannot speak of the conundrum surrounding paperwork- the tactics and the shifts- without addressing the conditions and the turning points during which this

contradictory system manifested itself. The events of June 30th, 2013 completely ruptured the way Syrians, as a category/non-category, navigated these systems. 2013 was a definitive year in Egypt, a source of contradictions and tensions. To some it symbolizes a violent military takeover, to others a revolution, and to a different set of others, a failure of a revolution. To many of the Syrians I grew to know, it was the year many of them took flight, as the conflict heightened in Syria. They chose to arrive in Egypt, attracted by (then) President Morsi's lenient policies, and the seemingly positive experiences that were reported by people online, as well as from families or friends living in Egypt. Many of the Syrians arrived in Egypt sometime in 2013, with the months of March and April seeing the greatest increase of arrivals (Ayoub & Khallaf, 2014: 10). Many others, like Omar, the CEO of SRF from Damascus, arrived before the Arab Uprisings, as part of a group of students continuing their studies across Egypt, primarily in faculties of medicine, engineering, or Al Azhar University.

Morsi's lenient policies provided Syrians free access to government schools, universities, and basic health care. This is significant, because although Egypt is a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, it made reservations on the articles mandating equal access to social services. Nonetheless, Syrians were allowed to enroll and benefit from these services on par with nationals, as they were described by the Morsi government as "guests" and "brothers" (Ayoub & Khallaf: 2014:11). The foundations for such sympathies were contingent on multiple layers, shifting between ideological basis, and an even more concrete basis of shared capital. It is true that many of those who arrived were attracted by the open door policy, but they were also building upon the established networks along the existing fraternal lines of Syrian capital, as well as Syrian and Egyptian Brotherhood business networks. Hence, many of factory owners, particularly those from Aleppo, made the journey to Egypt and established

a textile empire so significant, that as of today, it is rumored that 80% of Egypt's textile industry has shifted to Syrian production. Paperwork was not an issue, since Syrians were given full access to the market, to education, and to the Egyptian social welfare institutions- they were treated as honorary citizens. Omar recalls this moment as the golden age of the Syrian time in Egypt. That moment, he nostalgically reminisces, was the time of *carte blanche*: sympathies with Syrians were so high, they reached levels that "surpassed the imagination," so much so that he was able to personally contact any level of power, meet with ministers, and receive media airtime whenever he desired. These personal connections were built from the moment of the 2011 revolutions, when Syrian students in Egypt began politically engaging Tahrir Square, and creating solidarity lines. Out of these solidarity lines, Omar was able to build enough social capital to easily cruise through dealings the pre-June 30th government. Of course, Omar was a special case, as he represented what traits easily assisted in building solidarity points: he came from a prominent Islamist family, his grandfather a respected scholar in the region, as is his father. The latter has been a vocal critic of the Assad regime and has since emerged as a powerful activist within the Islamist opposition post-revolution-movements, which also became headquartered in a welcoming Egypt during the 2012-2013 period. Hence, these relationships were mediated through the convergence of what he represents, both in the Islamist ideological sense, and the capital he was linked with, illustrating the transportation of the multi-layeredness of Syrian wealth. In this case it consisted of an established Damascene family, transported to the Gulf as a result of tensions with the Assad family predating the revolution-, and who had a pre-existing relationships with Egypt prior to the revolution. To illustrate this relationship, Bassem, who is also Omar's best friend, told me to imagine this scenario: both he and Omar walk into a closed conference, both

not knowing anyone attending, yet, by Omar simply saying his surname is immediately granted entrance. Bassem, on the other hand, is “out.” Bassem, to make the point, cuts the air with his hands, using it to push the figure we all imagined to the side, gesturing grandly to allow Omar’s air figure entrance into the door.

A divergence of who represents the Syrian question in Egypt occurred during this contemporary 2012/3 moment, when the Syria Relief Foundation was established and registered as an organization, whose role as a community relief organization I expand on in Chapter 3. The Etilaf (The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces), on the other hand, was one of the political movements that emerged in post 2011 era. As the Syrian revolution became more complex and militarized there were increasingly calls for alternative forms of governance. These calls began finding their ways into the formation and establishment of various collectives, which varied ideologically and politically. While they were diverse in their leanings, the beginnings of an umbrella political organization took the shape of The Syrian National Council, which was formed in August 2011. As more collectives followed suit, the need to organize and unify them was deemed necessary. In November 2012, under the tutelage of various Gulf countries, most notably Qatar, , the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces (Etilaf) was formed in Doha, Qatar. It was then that Moaz Al Khatib, the former imam (religious leader) of the Ummiyad masjid-, was elected president of the Etilaf. Originally headquartered in Istanbul, a collective decision was made to transfer it to Egypt, a fellow Arab state easily accessible to activists within the region, near the headquarters of the Arab League, and hosted by Morsi’s government, which had friendly policies towards the Syrian opposition, particularly those with Islamist leanings.

This friendliness translated itself materially through support from Egypt's Foreign Ministry. Not only did Etilaf receive formal recognition from the government as a political entity, it also received monetary support. The support garnered them a large, fully paid villa in New Cairo, and a seat at the Arab League (from which the Syrian government was expelled). Cairo, in that moment, became the headquarters for all sorts of Syrian opposition activists, ranging from Islamists to Leftists to former Baathists; it served as a meeting point for opposition leaders throughout the region to attend conferences, convene, and easily depart and arrive. Its location in New Cairo, which is fifteen miles southeast of Cairo, is very telling. This location, on the outskirts of Cairo, can be read as the extension of very specific modes of capital, and speaks to the neoliberal project that has for years attempted to cast these outskirt cities as new configurations of class and institutive sites of governance. New Cairo has become representative of this transformation, which speaks to not only the emerging frontiers, and consequently, the bordering of wealth and capital; but also foreshadows the transplantation of a significant number of bureaucratic, financial, and governmental institutions into these new frontiers, particularly with the Cairo 2030 goal of establishing a new capital. This transformation has already begun, with the inauguration of the new Ministry of Interior taking place on April 27, 2016. The headquarters of Etilaf, as a result, was a natural precursor to such measures. The villa itself is nondescript, and from the outside, appears indistinct from the rest of New Cairo- aesthetically challenged and disconnected from the rest of Cairo. I visited it one day on a detour with Omar, Fayez, and Bassem, on our way back from Oubur. As soon as I walked through the iron clad door, I noticed a large conference room, desks arranged at the peripheries, and rollup pro-revolution banners. Looming over us, casting its shadow, and arresting our gazes, was a massive revolution flag that was planted in the middle of the hall.

Stepping into the conference room, there was a prodigious table with microphones on each seat, evoking the tables where regional negotiations come to be discussed, and eventually wither, as they all seemed to. We jokingly took our positions on the wooden table: Omar on one end, I opposite to him, with Bassem and Fayez, the latter a SRF staffer working in public relations, positioning themselves in the middle. Omar cleared his throat, straightened his shoulders and began: “Bismillah and Salam, my dear brothers, this is a hard time, we are in difficult times, and it seems as though there is no solution,” as though he was reading a script we all have internalized and can recognize immediately. We all laughed at the time, realizing how familiar his pompous speech sounded to all the performances that preceded, coincided and concluded the conflicts we all grew up listening to then, and today. I later learn, from Omar, that EU/US/Arab diplomats and UN representatives used to attend the discussions that took place in that conference room to follow the Syrian opposition scene.

The hard times Omar might have jokingly defaulted to echoed in the now empty chambers of the Etilaf, and evokes a moment not too long ago, when outward and inward flows were a constant state of the villa. In the heyday of Etilaf, it seems as though Egypt was bursting at the seams, and in many ways it was. Not only were Syrians entering in large numbers but, in the US, where I was, I recall Egyptians in the US discussing whether they should return to Egypt, back, whether this might be a moment for democracy, albeit Islamic, to take hold in Egypt. People who were banned from Egypt under Mubarak were taking their first trips back, some having been gone for decades. This moment in Egypt represented so much to so many different people- those in the margins were able to enter and leave, and those who were in the margins for so long were finally able to make their way towards the center. It also became a ground for resisting what was deemed the Brotherhood’s flippant policies, increasing

Islamization, and benevolent stance towards the violence against the protesters taking place. It was a time of contradictions and confusion- a period of drastic power plays between the new government and old forces and governance practices , as well a meeting point of activist movements against both systems of power. These all amassed into calls for then President Morsi's removal (with some of these calls brokered by the military itself), resulting in many Egyptians taking to the streets on June 30th, clamoring for Morsi to step down. The Egyptian social was divided, and different geographies emerged as points of political demarcations: Tahrir Square, for so long the symbol of revolution, became the place where anti-Brotherhood protesters (some of which were pro-military, some anti-military) went, while Rabaa Square, in Nasr City and Nahda Square, in Giza, became the main place where pro-Morsi supporters went and camped, hitching tents and a stage- with organized programming, speeches, chants, prayer times, and concerts taking over the airwaves- appearing as the "Woodstock of protests." There also was a third square, Sphinx Square, where those who opposed the Brotherhood, yet also opposed the Army stood protesting. On July 3rd, 2013, the military overthrew Morsi, and began working towards clearing Rabaa Square as well as Nahda Square, as the military decided that the squares had been occupied for far too long. This proved contentious, and the months of July and August were a dance between the military forces and the protesters, with the threat of violence a slivered whisper underlying every press release. On the morning of August 14th, I woke up to my mother screaming. She was on the phone with a family friend, whose visibly upset voice also echoed from the receiver: "They're killing them, oh god, they're shooting them and burning them!" My mother, and as it turned out, most of her friends, were watching the live feed from Rabaa Square, an activity that had become common place, and marked the summer of 2013 for me. We woke up, slept, and ate iftar surrounded by the sounds

coming out of my mother's laptop; we became acquainted with the speakers, recognized the voices of the singers, the chants, the imams. Signs that the situation would turn violent were scattered throughout the Brotherhood's statements and the military's decrees, but in my mother's scream, echoed by her friend's and the distant screams echoing out of her laptop- these whispers amplified into a scream. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Brotherhood supporters were killed or arrested, and a wave of distrust became the weather. Within this chaos, the army moved quickly to crush any dissent, designating the Brotherhood a terrorist organization, and an atmosphere of fear that external interference was going to intervene settled in the Egyptian social. Thousands of Brotherhood members were arrested, and the ensuing fear of violence against the regime, and of outside forces interfering in internal Egyptian politics permeated the Egyptian social, and became a rallying cry against anyone who might snap the tenuous thread on which Egypt was hanging.

That liminal fear of the snap translated into action against the largest group of outsiders in Egypt, the Syrians. Almost immediately following the transition, the government passed a law that established a visa system for all incoming Syrians, resulting in a screeching halt to the steady stream of Syrians entering the country, and ending the free movement historically characteristic of Egypt and Syria's relationship (Ayoub & Khallaf, 2014:11). Several layers underline the reasons as to why this happened, some mentioned earlier of Brotherhood capital tied with Syrian capital, but also, there were fears that Syrians sympathized with the Brotherhood, and might create solidarity lines that could threaten any attempts at security and stability. The event's impact was devastating to the Syrian community, which had now become outsiders once more, the dangerous fifth column. The impossibility of getting an entrance visa spoke of a closure that expanded beyond that moment. Etilaf, and many other civil society

movements, like the SRF, suspended their work. Omar, who constantly asserted that he was not directly affected by the coup, left the country for a couple of months, gauging the sentiments from afar to determine when it would be safe for him to return. He was not alone; in the first few months after the coup, thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of Syrians left Egypt, many to Turkey, which was very open to these flows, particularly due to Turkey's sympathies to President Morsi and the Brotherhood. Many of those coming into Turkey had a significant amount of capital, and that period saw millions of dollars' worth of businesses pack up and leave Egypt. This shattered Syrian flows into Egypt, and as the number dwindled, it directly impacted the Euro-Mediterranean route, which saw an explosion of people seeking ways to get to Europe. This also hit home for SRF, as one former staff member, Karam Babong, was one of those who left after the coup, only to meet his demise in the raging waves of the sea.

Classifying Arrival: Re-Configurations of Community

The shifts that took place immediately after the coup exemplifies the ways in which the Syrian category changed to absorb such difference. To categorize is to understand and place, hence why the questions- when did you come to Egypt and how did you come to Egypt produces an imagination of what categories this person might belong to. How one "arrives" to Cairo magnifies class and refugeeness and its various manifestations is seen in not only route, but also in how the initial relationships to the city is determined. Prior to the coup, one received an entrance stamp, no visa or additional paperwork required. Leila, whose story I prefaced my thesis with, discussed how the stamp meant nothing, they felt welcome and did not hesitate to step in to help the officers pass out the passports. Her pride in receiving official recognition for such an act exemplifies the ease with which the entrance to Egypt was in that

moment. Adnan, former graphic designer at SRF from Daraya, seconds that feeling of ease, coming to Egypt via Damascus airport with his family after his father was brutally executed in the town square. Yet, both Leila and Adnan represent those who needed to leave everything behind and flee due to the war and the conflict- the new wave of Syrians. Their arrival to Egypt, when juxtaposed with Omar and Bassem's arrival, along with other Syrians students who were there before the conflict spoke to the difference that emerges: either they were "Gulfies (Syrians living in the Gulf) or they were wealthy business families that long had familial and capital relationships with Egypt. While they all make up the tapestry that is the imagined Syrian community, the roles of experts falls on those who were there before, who served as mediators and guides for the newly arriving Syrians. These interactions all forge together to give insight in the ways the intertwining of sovereignty and subjectivities also play a role, and the hierarchal classifications that not only their entrance signifies, but also the silences that emerge in the need to facilitate navigation.

The Silent Entrance: Nawar as the Other Other

By silences, echoing Truillot, I mean to shed light on the ones who do not make it to the common narrative of Syrians entering, of the ways in which the Syrians see themselves. Leila's story in the preface touched upon a group of people that she designated as "other "on the boat- the Nawar. To recall, she mentioned that their habits were different, and regretted that they were given Syrian passports, as they do not fit the clean image of what she perceives a Syrian to be. However, Leila's sentiment is not individual, as I first heard the term Nawar used as an insult in jest, "stop being a *Nawar*", "His *Nawari* actions are the reason this happened to him," which promoted me to ask what exactly is a 'Nawar' . The responses I got varied, but the most common was, "They are like Beduins, always moving, similar to the gypsies here, but

different”, and “They are only Syrian because they happened to be in Syria”. Nawar are “peripatetic peoples” who live and migrate within Syria, and typically are reputed to earn their living by providing musical, handicraft, and fortunetelling services, as well as begging (Berland, 2004: 72). While the Nawar are spread out throughout Syria, there is a significant number in Northern Syria, namely Aleppo. That means that usually, they arrive to Egypt via ferry, like Laila. Notes shared with me via a colleague who worked at an INGO discussed these arrivals with alarm, because the INGO feared that the Nawar would “transplant” their begging habits to Egypt’s major cities. What makes the Nawar community stand out is the Syrian social’s rejection of them is prominent, and any mention of them in a conversation is usually responded to negatively. It is only with the Syrian national project, which began during the Independent Syrian Republic and continued under Hafez Al Assad, that the need to establish the category of the Syrian citizen emerged, thus resulting in many Nawar being granted citizenship, and experiencing “state intervention” in terms of army conscription, mandatory education, etc (ibid). However, given their nomadic and mobile lifestyles, many did not receive identification, and thus when the revolution and subsequent war broke out, found that they were without papers and therefore unable to leave the country using the traditional pathways across national borders. As a result, those without papers were smuggled out of Syria, into Turkey and sowed away in the bottom of Turkish cargo ships and ferries to Egypt.

The report provided by my colleague from the INGO shows how intricate the operations are, and the many different routes migrants take to come to Egypt. One route again takes us back to the preface, with Laila’s story. As she was on the top deck of her ferry, which is the case for many of those coming “legally,” stored within the cargo would oftentimes be Nawar and young men escaping military service, and hence those who do not have the proper

exit paperwork. Another route, one that is only discussed in internal memos within the INGO circle, shows a more sinister system: the *sans- papiers* are boarded in with the cargo, where they are then transferred to smaller Egyptian boats in the middle of the sea, and then they disappear inland, and their whereabouts are unknown. The report estimates that the boats arrived in the Domyat Port three times a week, with the number of migrants per boat equaling between 700 to 1000. When I further asked my colleague how this took place, logistically, and how this is dealt with by the Egyptian state, he stated that there is a deal between the Turkish liners, who pay for the journey of the migrants, and the Egyptian officials. A proxy boat is sent out and caught by the Egyptian coast guard, where a symbolic number of migrants are then detained, while the rest disappear, raising concerns about not only smuggling but also illegal corruption within the ranks of the Egyptian Coast guard. The Nawar etch away at the distinctions assumed about the Syrian social because they have been similarly displaced but have a distinct position along the continuous and perpetual periphery. They have existed outside the realm of citizenship, be it in terms of Syrian passports or modes of transportation, and are rejected by the Syrian social. This not only strips them of the protection of any sovereign entity, but pushes them outside the narrative of what it means to be Syrian. Upon arrival, they usually all received a UNHCR card.

The ways in which different bodies travel the borders and cross entry points speaks to the how the community understands itself, particularly by defining who is inside, and who is rendered outside, and in this instance, paperwork works in reinforcing these categorizations. While the Nawar are rejected from the Syrian social and its understanding of Syrian-ness as exemplified by those using the term as an insult; the men who have fled the army are lauded for their actions. And though they both come via the bottom of the vessel, the way the social

accepts their navigation of the community is different. It speaks to the idea of the good Syrian versus the Bad Syrian classification, rooted not only on citizenship, or understanding of community, but also class. In conversations I have had with various Syrians, the notion of hard work, and being part of a larger middle class were signifiers of the way the community is imagined- hence the disgust with the Nawar. Paperwork, here, alludes so much more. It is the reconfiguration of what it means to be Syrian, what it means to attempt to draw borders between whose bodies belong inside the social, and who should have never been considered inside from the beginning. I found it very interesting that the Nawar were incorporated in the Syrian social by Hafez Al Assad at a pivotal moment of Syrian nation making; they were needed to create the Syria in the way it is understood. However, it seems the rejection by the social, and the ways in which those around me in SRF seemed to identify within it, is both a contradiction- as they describe the revolution a scream for equality and dignity yet reject the Nawar, as well as solidification of the revolution- the call for the overturn of the Assad regime and their interventions to shape the Syrian social. Initially, I struggled on whether or not I should add the moment of arrival stories in this work, as I thought it had no impact on the everyday lives- yet, whenever any new Syrian arrived into our circle, the first question would be “where are you from in Syria”, followed by, “when did you arrive to Egypt?”. The answers to these questions immediately place the answerer on the hierarchy of paperwork, classifying them based on how their struggle is imagined- a struggle made difficult with the new process for residency that the Egyptian state began enforcing post-coup.

Patients of the Mogamaa: Waiting for Residency Permits

“How poor is the Syrian. Even in the house of God, he is terrified and scared. -This is true and not a joke- A Syrian is in a masjid in Lebanon. A police officer enters and sits besides him,

asking how much time is left till the iqama? The Syrian responds, 2 months and 10 days. The police officer responds, “Man, I meant how much time left till the iqama for prayer (the secondary call for prayer, and not the residency permit). They say the police officer spent the entire prayer laughing at this exchange”. (Whatsapp Conversation, 2017)

This joke, or “*not a joke*” as the post prefaced, was shared by Shehab, the Chief of Operations (COO) of SRF from Daraya, on the SRF staff WhatsApp group, which includes every single staff member in the foundation, a total of about 46. Only one person responded in the otherwise active group with smiley face emojis. It is in the silence of the staffers that the conundrum faced by Syrians interacting directly with the Egyptian state emerges. Throughout my fieldwork, this is the single most referenced issue that peppers almost every conversation, every gathering, every hello and goodbye. The joke translates the fear that has now occupied the residency process, and speaks to the constant shifts that take place within the process, the flux that emerges as a result of the uncertainty the system presents. There are five types of residency permits: a student visa, the UNHCR yellow card, a visa based on investments in Egypt, one through marriage or Egyptian relatives, and finally, the hardest, “and near impossible to get” work visa. Each one is approached differently, and conversations often highlight the ways in which such strategies reflect the process-bending practices used to achieve residency status. Every choice means a different reconfiguration in how one deals with power, whether it be via the Syrian embassy, or UNHCR, whether they would expose all the overlapping documents they have to the Egyptian authorities, or withhold them- the intricate ways in which they converge and diverge around these systems of governance as just one of the many tactics they employ to navigate. The UNHCR yellow card refers to the card issued to those who register as asylum seekers with the organization. While it does not guarantee resettlement, it does provide protections, particularly protections against deportation. Many

Syrians, if they arrived before August 2013, only registered with UNHCR if they needed financial aid, almost never disclosing to the others whether or not they did. There was almost always a disclaimer, a reasoning as to why they needed to register, like “we left Syria quickly, and Baba had a hard time finding a job in the beginning, so we received aid for a few months, but we stopped when we didn’t need it.” Before June 30th, only those who needed aid or wanted to be resettled registered with UNHCR, all others were able to get by using student visas. Those student visas were acquired by registering in a school, receiving a proof of registration from said school, and using that proof to get residency. Before June 30th, people were able to go to any Azhar school, register, and receive the paper- I remember accompanying Amal, who hails from Damascus, and is the head of the social services department at SRF, to attempt to retrieve a registration paper, and her telling me she registered in the Azhar girl’s middle school where she first arrived. Amal is a mother of four, and is teetering on the edge of forty, yet she was able to register and receive the student visa- which thus sheds light on both the strategies and tactics that are utilized in the reconfiguration of the self that takes place when attempting to navigate the paperwork process, as well as the ease that time period provided.

Now, working on getting an Iqama has turned into a *de facto* medical condition. Recently I asked Qusay, former staffer at SRF with whom I have maintained contact, how he was doing, only to hear him sigh the word, “*iqama*,” to let me know how he’s doing. “They are giving me such a hard time”, he told me, “Making it near impossible to get it. It’s been months.” He was not alone, every single conversation recently seems to be about the residency permit, or the family reunification program. The waiting for months that the process brings is how “domination works.” According to Ayuero , it is “through yielding to the power of others; and

it is experienced as a waiting time: waiting hopefully and then frustratedly for others to make decisions, and in effect surrendering to the authority of others” (2009: 4). This domination underlines how waiting produces the “iqama” condition, one whose ailments must be subdued in hopes that the waiting will come with the eventual healing. It can also be seen in the changing policies of the Egyptian government, with the newest installment of this series being the establishment of a new way to complicate the residency process, the introduction of fees for overstaying (which they had previously been exempt from) and also making it near impossible to get a student visa. This difficulty is the direct translation to the shift in how the Egyptian government seeks to deal with the Syrian community, post- International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan and pound flotation, which took place in November 2016. The complications in the system, making it near impossible to get the iqama outside of the UNHCR card system, speaks to how Syrians are being pushed to the refugee category, an attempt, Omar and others seems to say, to get the attention of donor countries such as the EU to their rising refugee numbers, and receive aid. Facing severe economic setbacks, Egypt resorted to the IMF for aid, and they received a 12 billion USD loan with a few stipulations. The main stipulation, and the one whose consequences resulted in an instant panic, was the floatation of the pound. By leaving the pound to the market, prices of everyday goods soared, and resulted on divisive changes to the social welfare system in Egypt, as well as everyday life costs. The metro, which for so long, costs one pound, doubled to two pounds, which might not seem to be a big jump, yet signifies the percentage with which life costs have risen. The stories I heard from the SRF staffers and their friends going back and forth to the various residency permit producing centers, like the Mogamaa in Tahrir Square indicate that the initial changes were subtle. First, Bassem told me he noticed bank ATMs opening in the lobby, something he brushed aside in

the beginning, thinking it was a simple renovation and expansion of the facilities. When the late fee system was established, he recalls the lightbulb moment when standing in the lobby, seeing Syrians shuffling to retrieve the thousands of pounds needed to pay off the fees, and he realized the premeditated plans for this shift. These fees are immediately forgiven if the person presents a UNHCR card, yet many refuse to register because that means they cannot travel outside of the country and they cannot have any official interactions with the Syrian embassy—both options that not only hinder mobility, but shift marriage, birth, and death systems to the UNHCR and outside of the traditional mechanisms with which they had previously dealt .

Thus, an important shift has taken place in how the Egyptian state deals with the Syrian as a category— first, as a guest and brother *a la* Morsi, then as a threat and outsider in the post-coup world, and recently, as a business opportunity from which money and profit may be made. The financial consequences have been significant, so much so that many, like Adnan, have decided to not even bother attempting to get residency permits at all, preferring instead to simply have the UNHCR card as a protection from deportation without getting it recognized by the Syrian or Egyptian state. This need to profit from the making of refugees has made the traditional mode of residency permit, the student visa, near impossible to get. Qusay, who I mentioned earlier, is a Gulf Syrian from Damascus, who graduated from Cairo University's Media Department in 2016. Having no way to receive a new iqama through the Cairo University, he registered for a faux master's degree through the Arab League Center. When he went to renew his Iqama, they demanded he provide attendance sheets and interim report cards that indicate he was in good standing. These new demands are all attempts to choke out all the Syrians who would have no choice but to register with UNHCR, something Qusay

would not do, because as a Gulf Syrian, his ability to travel to and from Saudi Arabia is essential, as his family is located there and might prove job opportunities in the future.

Standing in line at the Mogamaa, or any paperwork producing entity (the Syrian Embassy, UNHCR, etc), has begun to be expressed through the lens of dignity. Having to move around, strategize, use Egyptian lawyers and connections to intervene has resulted in a conversations that strategize, and emphasize the difference that is produced through these processes. What does it mean to stand in a line, having to wait for hours only to be told to return again? Bureaucracy is often times assumed to be stable, a process in which the state maintains and administers; however, as questions of waiting, how long, and why one must wait, arise, the uncertainty behind the experience gives way to what Ayuero describes as, “*subjective uncertainty finds its roots in objective unpredictability*” (2009: 82). While walking alongside the Nile, Bassem discussed with me and Fayez a Facebook post recently shared by a friend of his. In it, the friend had posted his journey to get an iqama in bullet points, each point beginning with the day, and following a similar pattern: “Day 1- I went and was told to come back to get document a, b, c; Day 2: I returned with documents a, b, c, only to be told I need to go back and get form d and e, from my school,” trailing off until it reached ten days. He ended his post with the sentiment that emphasized where he thinks they can go with their system, and iterated his refusal to return to do any kind of paperwork. The Mogamaa, and all these institutions then, become a place where the various embodiments of the state[s] comes face to face with the bodies they seek to categorize and organize. It becomes evident in the way the building itself is organized. In the Mogamaa, there are specific windows and branches of the building dedicated to foreigners. Entering, it seems as though they are overlapping lines of chaos, and attempting to make sense of the order proves difficult, until you start analyzing the

bodies and semantics of those around you. My sister and I went to the Mogamaa in the Winter of 2016/2017 with my uncle in hopes of figuring out a way to get our Egyptian paperwork. My uncle had called a relative to see if he had a connection on the inside who could help us, and after arrangements were made, we walked into the room with the Sergeant who was in charge of Foreigner Affairs. I later traced in other conversations that this Sergeant is the one who approves/rejects all residency permits dealing with foreigners, often coming in for two hours a day to sign the requests, and leaving, regardless of the amount of people waiting for him. That day, he was very cordial to my family, ensuring we got everything we needed, and walking us the various windows to navigate our paperwork process. While we were unsuccessful in our attempts to get our papers, we got our answer immediately, and thus this moment importantly stands out to how different bodies, notions of class, and nationality all intersect to define the experience of category production, as well as the ways in which it is tactically navigated.

The residency process begins on Facebook, it seems, as daily tips are shared and blogposts are produced to let people know what documents they need to bring with them, what they need to say at the window, what should not be said/ disclosed in order to receive xyz permit. It is also a space in which jokes about Syrians and the residency permits make their way into the social. One that stood out was about a Syrian actor, Tayim Hassan, who had recently married an Egyptian anchor, with the caption to his wedding picture cheekily stating, "Congrats to Tayim Hassan on his five year residency permit, you think we don't see the game you're playing?" Inside these groups, you find amongst the diverse content, pictures of bureaucratic employees who are kind and make the process swifter, and the names of those who are difficult to work with also exchanged. Yet, these Facebook groups, run by Syrians (usually/ mostly men) also serve as policing and disciplinary bodies, constantly giving the

“*Jalya* [community]” advice on how they should conduct themselves as a collective, particularly when interacting with Egyptian officials in the iqama/ family reunification process. “The Egyptian government has graciously opened up first degree family reunification,” the post stated, and “We ask that you arrive on time, stand in line in an orderly manner and wait for your turn... upon request from the Sergeant, several admins of the group will be there to answer any questions and organize the line... please, do not argue with the Sergeant.” Thus, in order to receive the benefits, and to show their gratitude, “they have to show that they are worthy of it by dutifully waiting” (Ayuro, 2009: 9). Through the process of waiting, as well as the different contradictory practices and decrees, the Egyptian state has attempted to establish *the waiting Syrian*, who, similar to the subjects Ayuro has written about, has learned how to wait in hopes of receiving what s/he has been strived for.

That is not to say that this waiting is a defeated waiting- there are ways in which the Syrian social outside the Mogamaa have learned to adapt to such contradictory practices. Many Syrians do not wish to have their UNHCR card registered with their Syrian passport, so that they can still maintain a relationship with the embassy to certify deaths, marriage, and renew passports. When they determine that that is the best course of action for their particular reasoning, they simply hide their UNHCR card when they are at the Mogamaa and apply for a residency permit based on their children’s school enrollment- two parallel modes of existence. When asked by the bureaucratic worker if they had UNHCR cards, they would simply utter a quick, “no.” Bassem recalled an instance when he was standing to do his paperwork, during which a man accidentally forgot to hide his UNHCR card, while telling the teller that he did not have one. This caused such an outrage, as all of teller’s suspicions had been confirmed, she returned papers with a denial, saying harshly, “All you Syrians think you can play with the

system, but we find out at the end.” The man took his papers away, and Bassem told me he would probably return in a week’s time, with a new application and no UNHCR card in sight. The teller would not remember him, and he would be able to get it the way he wanted it. Another instance was in the family reunification program that Egypt recently instated, which allows for Syrians to bring family members from the first degree for a visit (parents, children, or spouse). However, as Syrians began applying in droves, some were getting approved, while others were getting denied. At first, this confusion sparked heated conversations, but as a pattern emerged, they realized that those getting refused were the ones whose families would be arriving from any place but Syria, like in the case of Bassem, whose family was in Saudi Arabia. When Bassem received his refusal, he was in shock, as his waiting was tempered by the understanding that everyone gets approved. However, after finding out the reason, he went back, received a new application, and simply wrote that they would be arriving from Syria. This new application got approved quickly, and his family arrived from Saudi Arabia a week later, because “no one at the airport knows to check- there is no communication between these institutions”. Eventually, an understanding in the Facebook sphere emerged, and others learned from the beginners mistakes. When the time came for Layla to apply for her brother, Amer, they simply changed the place of origin to Aleppo instead of Saudi Arabia, and while the process took a while, at the end, they were finally able to reunite with him after twelve years of separation..

The tactics I described above show the contradiction within the paperwork process through which the state’s attempt to categorize the populations.. The ways in which those at SRF, and the Syrian social constantly adjust to the contradictory decrees speak to not only the screens and tactics they utilize, but pushes the understanding of escape routes- routes that are

“a mode of social change that is simultaneously elusive and forceful enough to challenge the present configuration of control (Papadopoulos , et el, 2008: xiv).

Liminal Detainment: A State of State Interventions

We were dropping off my best friend Minna at the airport because she was returning to the United States. She had been staying with me for a few months during my fieldwork, volunteering as a nutritionist at SRF’s clinic. At the time she was leaving, Omar was in Saudi Arabia visiting family, and was scheduled to arrive a few hours before her flight took off. Omar was returning just in time to finish his last leg of medical school exams, which had been delayed two years as he attempted to organize SRF, and as he became involved in the political movements surrounding the revolution. We arranged a goodbye dinner, where we would meet half way (him on his way back from the airport, her on her way to the airport). The group waited for Omar to arrive, and as we sat waiting for Bassem to drive up, the time seemed to extend, with every phone call from Bassem indicating that something is wrong- until Bassem arrived without Omar at the restaurant. He had been detained due to issues with his passport, and every effort taken to release him had been turned down. “We will try again when we go drop Minna off,” Bassem stated, and while the conversation sobered for a moment, it continued, everyone brushing it off as a routine procedure that would easily be solved. “*We will try again,*” an ode to the repetition that has become commonplace in the seemingly cat-mouse dynamic which has emerged, it seems, in the complicating routine procedures that have become embedded in the everyday. When we arrived later that night, we found out two things: Minna missed her flight, and Omar’s detainment was a lot more complicated than we thought. Minna, an American passport holder, was easily rescheduled, but as for Omar, he was to

remain the night in detention. Bassem and I went in to attempt to see Omar, and give him food. I was brought along because Bassem figured that my Egyptianess might perhaps aid in mediating the situation, but we were turned down and left defeated. The next day, Bassem returned, and was able to see him and give him food, and whatever provisions he ordered- this became an almost daily ritual. As the guessing games began to try to understand why Omar was detained, puzzle pieces began to fall into place. Omar's passport had expired months before, and his parents hired a middleman in Turkey to navigate the Syrian system and procure an extension sticker. The family's anti-Nizam stance made any type of personal interaction with bureaucratic procedures near impossible, thus making the third party a necessity. However, as Omar attempted to enter Cairo Airport on that particular day, he was stopped, searched, and told his sticker was fraudulent. The middleman, it seemed, had opted for the cheaper option, and pocketed the difference. Fears that he might be deported began to be whispered in the community, and was an option everyone feared, because deportation meant no return- Not only would Omar's deportation hinder, nay, end his medical school career, but it also meant the community was losing a leader/ spokesperson- a buffer between the Syrian community and the Egyptian state. After two weeks of intense negotiations, including one where I asked a family member to become involved only to be told his case was of high security, Omar was released. Everyday throughout his detainment, we were told he might be released or deported tomorrow, in the going back and forth, discussion rose regarding how it seems as though, in this particular process of waiting, there is a sense that he is being punished, for what, we don't know yet. This feelings fester in the nexus of power and self, as Auoryo, building on Barry Schwartz, reiterates how "punitive sanctioning through the imposition of waiting...is met in its

most extreme forms when a person is not only kept waiting but is also kept ignorant as to how long he must wait” (79).

In his time inside, as he jokingly states, he came to be regarded as an authority, something he was able to broker by bribing the guards with food, as well as experiencing the day to day workings of the detainment center. He was able to create a comfortable stay for himself, even managing to trick the guards and smuggle his phone in to talk to us and order food, thus allowing him to curry favors from the guards for his roommates at the airport. He reported so many different kinds of migrants would come and go, that he began noticing the patterns that paralleled certain citizenships- Syrians aligned with deportation, Palestinians meant being stuck in the limbo of no state to be deported to, and Sudanese, Philippina and Moroccan woman, each had their own deportations and legal procedures. His extended stay made him a sort of a migration expert, and he would provide people with advice, he said, on how long they should expect to stay, and where they would most likely be deported to (in the case of refugee/ asylum seekers). In his position inside, a new understanding of himself emerges, as Omar always understood himself to be a mobile person. He was born in Saudi Arabia, spent summers in Syria, and lived for a few years in Indonesia- thus traveling was something he has always done with ease- yet, as he was locked inside the airport for two weeks, he told me he realized how as a Syrian, he is stripped of all rights, regardless of how much money he might have, or project to have. Omar’s classed body, where he represented/ presents himself as one who not only enjoys class privilege, but also reaps the benefit of the social capital his family and he has acquired, is ruptured in the in-betweenness of airport detainment. This precarious existence was all laid bare in that moment- his Syrian-ness and its “meaninglessness” a hard pill to swallow. Not long after, while sitting at the SRF office,

Omar and Bassem began discussing the newest intermediary between Omar and the Syrian embassy to fix his fraudulent paperwork. Omar brought up his attempts to find alternative citizenship, saying how “even” the Sudanese citizenship is better than the Syrian one, and recounted a story of a wealthy businessman who recently failed to acquire the Sudanese citizenship. While Omar’s issues have since been resolved, and he travels freely between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, this incident brings to light the instability with which those who inhabit the grey zone navigate. It is a liminal and precarious rug which they tread, one that can easily be pulled when they are rendered outside- the exception. It is in the juxtaposition between power, and its ability through paperwork, to determine who is inside, do these reconfigurations take place. It also highlights the forms of granulated sovereignties with which Omar has to navigate and configure himself too, and with which one does not know who to hold “accountable.” This leads to a muddled image of the hierarchal understanding of the sovereign, in which life and death and all matters in between is determined by the ultimate power- yet, when one is no longer faced with this metaphorical totem pole, but rather is spinning in a pinball machine of powers, slamming against bumpers of the different manifestations of the sovereign provoking a question of its very existence.

Becoming/ Unbecoming a Refugee: Different Hats for Different Things

“*I am not a refugee*”, Amal, tells me defiantly as we exit a doctor’s appointment I was accompanying her to. The doctor had just spoken to her about how she was giving her a discount for her services, although the price she charged seemed on par with the prices of other private clinics - on account that she does that for all her Syrian and Iraqi patients; because she understands they come from harsh circumstances- “I treat you as I would treat an

Egyptian.” Amal did not leave the office impressed, emphasizing, “I am here with my own money, I do not ask anyone for assistance, and I do not need anyone’s assistance. But Egyptians like to feel like they are hosting us- but no, I’m not a refugee.” Later, when attempting to get paperwork done through an Egyptian school, she wondered out loud, jokingly, whether she should say that she is a Syrian refugee escaping the war, without her husband, in order to receive the certificate of registration, a crucial paper for Egyptian residency permit. Here, the utilization of the single woman refugee troupe is used as a tactic with which she can navigate the system; it is not a malicious act, but rather an acute reading and adjusting to the situation. In this contradiction, the screen, “the shells of operation”, to evoke Simone, emerges to complicate how the concept of the refugee applies/ does not apply in the everyday manifestations of life for Syrians in Egypt.

This manifests in conversations surrounding the construct of refugee and self were brought up in different times through my fieldwork. To be a Syrian refugee in Egypt is to negotiate your everyday, to wear the refugee hat when it might seem as a stepping stone to survival, and to cast it away when it is no longer is necessary. It is not a malicious act, but rather one that is adapted to make sense of a place in which Syrians are requested to act a certain role, and articulate what they are versus what they are not. One theme that is prevalent in almost all the conversations I had centered on assistance and the relationship with the Egyptian state. Almost immediately when asked whether or not they see themselves as refugees, I am told by Lama, the media staffer at the SRF, “I’m not a refugee. I’m here with my own money. I pay my own rent and work on my own. Refugees are the ones in tents who receive aid.” This sentiment is repeated constantly, in different ways, during other conversations I had. This connection to capital, and the ability to be financially independent,

reads into the notion that a refugee must not only be one who is individually designated as in need of protection, but also as in need of support and whose life depends on such an integral relationship. It also speaks to the ways in which Syrian capital does not even ascribe itself to refugeeness, it is a condition with which they are not associated with, yet in moments when it is deemed useful, the refugee screen is used.

Tents, as a representation of refugeeness, must also be tied with mobility, and how the ability, or lack of, to move, is symbolized in one's understanding of self as a refugee. Mobility is always tied with the notion of return, and I noticed a correlation between identifying as a refugee, or moments of hesitation before rejecting the notion that they are refugees, with where one is originally from in Syria. This is particularly relevant to cities that have completely been emptied out, like Daraya and now Aleppo, or districts that are under ISIS's control, such as Deir Al Zour. Thus, those adamantly rejecting refugeeness as a category tend to come from Damascus, and areas still deemed safe, and returnable when conditions permit. The internal battle as to whether or not they see themselves as refugees plays out in the conversations they have with each other- and the deconstruction of whether a refugee is one who receives assistance and support from the host community- or one who no longer has a home, or a place to go back to. It is within this imagination that one begins the process of either accepting or rejecting whether or not they see themselves as refugees, and its implications.

Regardless, to be a refugee, one must be in the Global North, according to the conversations I had. When one begins the resettlement process, an actualization of what it means to be a refugee begins to emerge, as s/he begins to attempt to articulate what one's self looks like in a place where his/her identities are defined first by their refugeeness before

anything else. Thus, one is transformed into a refugee once they arrive to the West, because as Lama states, “In Germany or America, I use social services, I am under the care of the country, they give me housing and aid- but here? None of that.” How one negates such an emergence is particularly singular in the case when one repeatedly rejects resettlement- as Shehab has done- rejecting Canada three times. When I asked why, he mentioned many things, amongst them autonomy and losing his identity (which he defined in nationalistic and religious terms), not being able to parent his children the way he deems fit based on his own principles, and questioning what becomes of him when the relationship is based on a power dynamic in which he is rendered outside the ability to choose. Whether or not that is the actual case in Canada, or any resettlement country might not necessarily matter in how one articulates themselves, since subjectivity, and notions of belonging tend to be a juxtaposition of one’s imagination and the socio-political creation of the social.

Being able to articulate how one defines his/her own narrative, and how categories shift is seen in some of the Syrians outward rejection of the UNHCR and what it stands for, stating that they see no point in registering as they do not even need the protections they offer. This comment sparked a debate amongst the group that was present, with some arguing that even if they don’t gain anything from it, the potential to be resettled is enough to let them keep it, and the question dribbled down to, “And what has the UNHCR done for you? Has it benefited you at all?” While the answer was a resounding no, many stood by the necessity of having a UNHCR card, particularly in the changing political environment in Egypt. Amal was one of the main advocates against the UNHCR, having already aggressively rejected the label of refugee when she was addressed as such. However, I recall the day we attempted to get a certificate of attendance from an Azhar middle school, since the residency permit of her now

married daughter in Saudi Arabia depended on it. The school had rejected giving her the attendance sheet, stating that her daughter had not attended a day at the school, for three years, and thus has been expelled from the school files. Negotiating the reestablishment of her daughter to the school was difficult, with the Egyptian administrator yelling, “This is what you Syrians do, you only do it for the residency permit, not to learn.” Following intense conversations, we were referred to the Office of Foreigner Affairs, where we spoke to a male employee about the predicament, and I served as the role of the “Egyptian neighbor.” While walking to his office, the mother jokingly said that she will start by saying, “Oh I’m a Syrian, I need you to help me, I left because of the war, and my husband is not with me.” Thus, by stating that she must fit a certain category to achieve her goals emphasizes the ways in which refugeeness is not only discussed, but also cast aside when unwanted. The refugee indicator is prioritized in the ways in which one presents him or herself. Therefore, while one might identify as a “refugee” in certain instances, he/she might also simultaneously reject the notion of being categorized and labeled as such in others.

Here, I juncture to a presentation I went to in the 6th of October tent. The main speaker, Souad, presented on refugeeness and the history of the refugee. She begins with the story of Prophet Mohamed, who she labeled as the first refugee in Islam, as he and his companions escaped persecution from Mecca and sought refuge in Medina. Those who made “hijrah (migration)” to Medina from Mecca were labeled “muhajireen (migrants)”, and since the reason behind their need to leave was to escape evil, they too were refugees. Tying this into the Syrian migration, Souad says that one must accept that a muslim’s time on this world is in of itself a hijrah, a migration. Thus life is intertwined with the flow of movement, and the trajectory of arrival is the Muslim’s arrival via death. Hence, Souad says, to be Syrian is to be a

refugee is to be Muslim, these are all interchangeable, and all speak to life. By using religion as an antidote to her exploration with refugeeness, Souad invites us to look at how the concept of refugee is a constant struggle for those who inhabit collectives who are identified as such. I found many of the people at SRF who explicitly told me they do not see themselves as refugees nodding in agreement with Souad's words, and I am sure, if this was said in the US, in an Islamic lecture at a Muslim convention, you would find many in the diasporic communities also seeing their migration and displacement as something intertwined with this the sense of religion. This alternative configuration speaks to the mobility of the category itself, and the ways in which the processes of identification are intertwined with what this chapter attempted to unpack: brushings with power.

I take a moment here to analyze the ways in which different categorizations are utilized as screens to navigate the system- namely, the gendered body. Souad has a peculiar story, one that stands out as she rolls through the introduction of herself, she always begins with “my mother is Egyptian, buried in the hills of Latakia, she fell in love with a Syrian man, and here I am, not a visitor but a family member back in Egypt”. With this introduction, she mediates the conversation to one that colors the rest of the interaction- here is someone that is Syrian, but palatable enough to be Egyptian. Yet, when Souad enters a room, everyone in the room pauses to take note of her- on days when she is meant to speak, she is always dressed in long dresses embroidered with Islamic and Arabic motifs, on anyone else, her clothes would seem like a cosplay costume, yet on her, they seemed natural. As she makes her rounds, she seems well-versed in the language of networking, gauging the person in front of her with a quick look; at the surface, Souad seems to be following the checklist self development speakers seemed to have adopted, and implemented at community events where they have become a common

fixture, yet as you scratch at this presentation, a more complex picture of who Souad is emerges.

Souad came to Egypt as many of the others, when things took a turn in Syria. She arrived with her husband and children, and soon after the coup, when things seemed to take a turn for the worst towards Syrians, her husband attempted to cross over to Europe via the sea. He, along with many others on the boat with him, never made it. As a result, Souad, now the sole breadwinner and provider for her children, delved deeper into her work, and began making a namesake for herself within the Syrian circuit, before emerging as a popular speaker with the self development field in Egypt at large. She now speaks at universities across the country, as well as attends and hosts conferences in Malaysia and Turkey. Souad's gendered body, when juxtaposed against Amal's usage of her gender to easily circumvent rigid policies, are both sides of the same coin- one can inhibit these screens, and use categories as tactics to navigate everyday landscapes.

The End of Polis? Discussions on Fragmented Sovereignty

The stories and experiences I explored in this chapter help recall the discussion in chapter 1 on the various ways in which the sovereign itself is called into question. The conversation surrounding refugees and displacement brings for the nexus of Latif's description of the Foucault- Agamben difference. Latif's reading of Foucault as a sovereign that is placed in the social is quite different from Agamben's reading of the sovereign as a sharp dichotomy, and within this chapter, discussions around refugeeness speak to the de-homogenization of such a power nexus. The end of polis- of the citizen- means accepting the understanding that refugeeness and the mobile figure is undermining and reconfiguring traditional understandings of the sovereign- with its multiplicity opening up new ways with

which it can be understood. The process of paperwork, of category making and subverting, as well as the way classed and gendered bodies navigate such processes, all speak to new modes the sovereign practices governance, as well as modifies it.

Chapter 3- Ngo-ization as Survival: The Nine Lives of SRF

We were all assembling to sit in our assigned spots, Omar behind his massive desk, Fayeze and Bassem in the secondary set of seats, and in the first set, I was to sit across from the visitor from the American consulate. I had gotten used to sitting across from the shifting seas of foreign faces that come into the office, as they attempted to assess the organization, to “know more about the Syrian community in Egypt”, and to see whether there was potential for partnership. My role was to be translator and mediator between the two parties, continuing to fill this in-between role as a mediator between the binary that emerges when dealing with international organizations- the us and them. Right before the visitor arrived, while preparing ourselves, Omar twitched suddenly, and jerked forward to remove a small flag from the flag stand on his desk and put it in the drawer. Ever since I was first introduced to Syria Relief Foundation, there had been three flags on the flag stand, an Egyptian flag, a Syria Relief Foundation flag adorned with its logo, and a Syrian pro-revolution flag. In the flutter of his movement, I realized that he took off the Syrian pro-revolution flag, leaving only the other two flags. Surprised, I inquired about this, with his response being something along the lines of needing to seem apolitical. “It doesn’t matter” , he said, “I’ll put it back as soon as she leaves”. As the drawer closed on the flag, the realization of the action set in, with Bassem dismissing it with an uncomfortable chuckle and a slight shake of his head. The mobility of the flag, and its usage/ non-usage speaks to the shift that exemplifies the SRF story, it has become a symbol of the process of ngo-ization: one rife with absorption into a larger neoliberal system, rife with categorizes that need to be navigated using different modes or shells of existence, rife not only with the precarity of existence that illuminates the necessity of shifting screens, but also with the possibilities to reconfigure not only as an entity but as individuals. This chapter not only

follows the shifts- the several lives and roles- of Syria Foundation, but also grapples with the self in a process of NGO-ization- what happens to revolutionary dreams, what happens to configurations and imaginations of the self in these liminal and crucial everyday remaking?

***“Of course there is a huge difference”*: Reflecting on Change and Transitions**

SRF was born in a moment in which the revolution(s) cries echoed in the midans of Egypt and Syria. There had been a small amount of students who were studying in Egyptian universities at that time, most of them from the Gulf due to the Syrian education systems refusal to acknowledge their grades. This constituted the first activists that went to Tahir Square and began immediately to organize with Egyptian revolutionaries. They made Cairo their battlefield, waging wars against Syrian institutions in Egypt. Omar and Bassem, alongside many of their friends, were some of the activists that were here before, and who proudly discussed the times they stole the electricity generator from the embassy or destroyed the Syrian embassy. Walking through Tahir Square Omar would point to where the Syrian tent would have stood, where they used to run for refuge when military forces tried to attack the protesters, and discuss the tactics they used to avoid getting caught. The revolution in Syria proved a platform for the expression of those in diaspora and constant displacement to voice their histories, their anti-Nizam stance, and they did so creatively. Those who discuss that moment always reflect nostalgically on the tent, the overwhelming support that existed in that moment, the sense of purpose, the sense of hope it represented. This sentiment invigorated them, as the students and activists immediately began shaping their own media teams, their own student networking groups, and eventually, a group dedicated to relief. It was also in this moment that Omar, as one of the main activists, began building his social network. Bassem

jokingly said that if Omar saw an activist group, he signed up to join them- whether it was the women's rights, the animal rights, the LGBTQ- find any group of people, he said, and you would find Omar there. He believed that his attempt to spread support for the Syrian cause allowed him to gain a diverse group of supporters when SRF began.

As the conflict and war in Syria increased, so did the amount of people arriving into Egypt. Faced with a sudden increase of Syrians, the student activists began looking at ways to support them, raising money amongst themselves and donors (particularly from the Gulf) to provide food baskets and pay the rent for apartments for families unable to afford it. Soon, their efforts expanded, and as such, a group of students, of which Omar was one, founded Syria Foundation. It functioned informally, relying on word of mouth and Facebook networks to find the cases and the ways to aid them. They began the project, Omar told me, with the assumption that the Syrian revolution was temporary, that transition will be similar to Tunisia and Egypt (this assumption was pre-June 2013); but as the crisis continued and the number of Syrians in Egypt increased, SRF expanded, they opened an office in downtown Cairo, and subsequently opened other offices in areas with large Syrian populations, namely in Nasr City, 6th of October, and Oubur. At that time, Omar juggled, as the head of the media department, between his SRF work and his other activist roles, as well as his medical school exams. At an almost parallel rate, many of Omar's Syrian friends moving to Europe, and he soon finding himself alone, with all the original founding members gone. Not soon after, the coup of 2013 served as the straw that broke the camel's back, those who had remained left at the first chance they could get- leaving an already shrinking team without leadership. Omar was the only one who stayed behind, and took over SRF as the new CEO. This transition is critical in

contextualize where SRF is today, to trace the decisions that were made to survive, and the tactics adopted to “not go under”.

Tents Worlds Away: From Dreams of Revolution to Dreams of Networking

Omar and I attended “*On the Justice of Fishes*”, a performance by a Syrian artist, who spoke about the biblical origin stories of the cities of refuge, and a world that is governed by the law of the fish: that of big fishes preying on smaller fish. She performed in Arabic and French, and the audience was overwhelmingly foreign, Omar recognized several INGO staffers who contacted him, including a manager at UNHCR, however, he was the only Syrian present in the audience. He had been invited to the D-Caf festival by its organizers, who reached out to him because of Syria Foundations increasing profile in the city, as well as the themes on refugeeness and mobility that seemed to have taken over all major film and art performance festivals in Cairo. The artist spoke of European cities, the fortress that is increasingly forgetting the humanity of those escaping, and the fishes- yet she leaves us with a resounding note, “nothing”, she says quite dramatically, “silences the call for justice”. Omar and I reflected on that note as we discussed the show on our walk to Dokki from Downtown. He liked the performance, but said he said he always leaves with a notion of wanting to ask, “and? What’s new?” It seems as though the target audience, as one had become accustomed to see, was the European audience and the scatterings of Egyptians who might see themselves as hosts to the refugee community- but to Omar, it seemed as though he thought these declarations were hollow and his hesitation around it showed where the law of the fishes falls short. It is not big fish eating small fish- it is small fish racing their ways through the cracks, to make life in the shadows cast by the big fish. While musing, we had made it to Tahrir square, where he again

enthusiastically pointed out where the pro-revolution Syria tent once stood during the revolution, becoming a center for Syrian activists and Egyptian protesters. Pictures shown to me show a prominent, yet plain, white tent with green banners framing it, the writing shrouding it seems to proudly scream, "*The tent of the Syrian Revolution*". In the pictures, you can make out hoards of people constantly moving about the tent, decorated with pictures of the dead// Bashar Al Assad's crimes coming out of Syria, and slogans of the revolution written inside. On the outside, a plastic flag of the revolution hung, and on it, the Egyptian protesters in the midan would write words of solidarity, curses against Bashar, stressing on the unity of the causes. An image of Omar, holding a microphone and screaming into the crowd, enticing them and stressing on the unity of the causes stands out, as it freezes the moment in which Omar seems to have frozen himself. The moment in which the revolution was where he poured all his hopes, all his aspirations of a future for his country, and the conversations surrounding his friends show that they too saw themselves in these moments of possibility. Omar constantly references this tent, references these moments as though to center himself, to center his movement- he particularly mentions it when I bring up any comments on absorption of ngo-ization of a movement- a constant conversation topic I have with him. While we finished crossing Tahrir square, Omar stood and looked back at it, pointing to me one final time where it stood, and then pointing to the hotel, Semaramis, smiling as he remembered where he and his friends used to run to hide from the army forces coming to clear the midan. As we turned to walk on the Qasr El Nile bridge guarded by the two lions, I casually remarked how it was a world away from the tent in 6th of October pitched by SRF in the past August (2016). He agreed, but added how it was a completely different moment. That is something I have also become accustomed to- the usage of the revolution to sometimes justify

stances- to center himself and the staffers point of start-, and other times, alienating the two causes as though they weren't aligned- functioning in two different spheres.

The tent in 6th of October was also hitched in a central area, this time in Midan Al-Hosary, a crucial space where “Damascus street”, lined with Syrian restaurants and businesses, famously exists. It is in this area where one experiences an out of body experience, where attempting to place oneself is muddled, as the sounds are Levantine with Egyptian undertones, versus other places in the city, where Egyptianness is prominent. 6th of October has become a catchphrase, encompassing all that is Syrian in Egypt- thus, when I received the phone call from Omar about the tent, I was not surprised that it was in 6th of October. Omar had been at Hajj, and I was in Marsa Matruh, enjoying my Eid vacation with family. As soon as I returned, I made my way to October with Omar, who told me the story of how it came to be. He was surprised I didn't know about it, stating that it's the only current topic of discussion in SRF's Whatsapp and Facebook groups. I asked him why he came back early from Hajj, since we weren't expecting him for a few more weeks- what he said next surprised me: he received a phone call from an Egyptian official, stating their desire that a project promoting the ties between the Egyptian hosts and the refugee communities be organized by Syria Foundation, and host events that will be attended by everyone, with musical numbers and workshops, to be covered by an intense Egyptian press. When Omar objected to the timeline, he was offered no alternatives or leeway, “you help us, we will help you in the future” was the line used. Musing over why we might think they were adamant about this tent and the expedited manner with which they pushed for it, Omar hypothesized that perhaps the officials wanted to give Egyptians a subtle lesson, one that stunts any musings of rebellion, because such thoughts will eventually be met with the same destruction and displacement Syrians were met with. Thus,

the tent, according to Omar, would act as a deterrent, it would emphasize the value of security over notions of liberty, illusions of peace over war. The adamancy of their request was off putting to Omar, who worried about the larger consequences this might have for SRF, would they be under more scrutiny? Would the Ministry of Social Solidarity request more audits, or a closer look into finances that were muddled due to navigating systems not built for organizations such as SRF? The jokes the Egyptian officials told him did not help, as they informed him that the request from the tent came from such high orders, that the power seems to be shifting, and soon, they would need him to act as an intermediary between them and the higher powers of the Egyptian state. That very state was felt as soon as we entered the tent, and any guise of rising of power was shattered: from the moment we arrived, we were flanked by police officers, letting us know they are standing guard next to the tent. For the rest of the week, two police vans and many police officers stood adjacent to the tent, their dark uniforms and blank stares following all activity taking place at the tent. Some plainclothes officers wandered in and out of the tent, announcing themselves silently and whispering to organizers before departing as quietly and quickly as they appeared.

The tent itself was a sight, originally, it was supposed to be the tent used in the Cairo International Book Fair, one that exudes modernity, cleanliness, its white canvas lighting up the space, the air condition cooling it and the overall atmosphere giving the impression of professionalism, as Shehab, the COO, put it. However, due to the miscommunication and disorganization of the Egyptian officials, the tent ended up being the same tents culturally linked with funerals and low-end election campaigning. Draped with the blue fabric and set up with dim lights and dusty fabric, one enters as though walking into a capsule, a pause from the hectic life around the tent, swallowed by the blue, the dusty, and the dim and nothing else-

until one focuses on the various groups setting up the tables, setting up the banners (the main banner introducing the tent to visitors: *The Popular Egyptian Campaign in support of our Arab Brothers [Syria, Libya, Iraq]*) and on the right of the tent, a team was busily assembling the gallery depicting the dead casualties of the war and the refugee camps with the tents housing Syrians who have fled the war. On the other end of the tent, small tables and booths were being assembled to showcase Syrian artists and small businesses, and the conglomeration was random, since the lack of time made the team desperate to call anyone who would be willing to present their work. A group of women artists presented their work, and further conversation showed that the team was made up of Syrian and Palestinian women, both presenting themselves as Syrian women to the press at the tent.

As a volunteer, I was assigned to be one of the ushers that describe the pictures in the gallery to visitors, where the pictures were taken and what specific event they were representing. As the team who was tasked with such a role was being assembled, a heated conversation took place to where the pictures may have been taken. Some of the volunteers were/ are cyber activists, and thus were regulated to the roles of assigning the places to the pictures, “Zataari camp is the one with the pebbled ground, Turkey camps are the ones with muddied grounds, like the camps inside Syria!”, Yaman confidently stated; Mohamed,, a volunteer from Deir AlZour would refute Yaman’s statement, arguing that it was the other way around, and while everyone began giving in their input, about which destructed neighborhood of Homs was shown, which border, Greece or Macedonia, was depicted (an analysis of the water bottles in the images, and a quick google search settled the debate for Macedonia), a lighter mood came over the crowd. One began joking, we can make up any facts, and our audience wouldn't know, “you see here”, Mohamed chuckled, “is Paris, and there, you

will find New York City.” He then turned to me and said, wouldn't that be something, if these places were actually like this. I half heartedly began my usual spiel of fortress Europe and the urban poverty in US cities before giving up, settling for absorbing and memorizing the information of the destruction in front of me that I would be called to present. Debates about what the picture gallery meant reflected a much bigger conversation that was taking place within the staff and volunteers- were they selling out the cause, they asked? Some mumbled that it felt as though they were packaging the war into minuscule pictures, their displacement reduced to bitesize tidbits about numbers, hunger, and seas- a marketing strategy that disregards the gravity of the war, or the dignity of the people depicted. To them, the gallery, and the tent in general, represented their lack of agency in a pawn-like game that seems to have ensued between them and the Egyptian state, in which, for the sake of survival, they must assume the shells of obedient, friendly subjects (at least, for the time being- the ode, ‘give some, take some’ ringing in our ears as it's constantly repeated to us).

As we assembled for the opening ceremony, the overwhelming number of cameras, lights, and press attendance was apparent, the nonexistence of a Syrian and Egyptian “civilian” target audience evident. Yet, it began the way all major events in SRF do, with a Quran recitation. I usually lose concentration in such moments, drifting to think about nonsensical things, but as Shehab, who was an imam in Daraya and had dreams of pursuing a PHD in Islamic Studies, began his recitation, I was immediately snapped out of my daydreams, as the verse he chose was very particular, and as I heard it, I began smiling. The verse he recited was often read in revolutionary movements and protests, as it speaks to the fragile power that exists between the subjects and their rulers: *Say, "O Allah, Owner of Sovereignty, You give sovereignty to whom You will and You take sovereignty away from whom You will. You honor whom*

You will and You humble whom You will. In Your hand is [all] good. Indeed, You are over all things competent” (Al- Imran: 26). This transgression, at-least to my ears, seemed to have gone unnoticed by those sitting around me, but it brought me back to the conversation we were having moments before, at the feelings of hopelessness in front of what it seems to be non-transgressible sovereign powers- yet, it seemed, that in this moment, this verse contradicted this feeling, it’s ending leaving a warning in the air, its notes of shifting tides a caution. This sense of caution was propelled by Omar’s opening speech, which spoke of the impact of war on the streaming number of refugees in the world, emphasizing the particularly welcoming environment Syrians face in Egypt. This was a stark difference from the usually political speeches Omar gives privately and at a personal capacity, as he has continued to be a political pundit and commentator on Egyptian shows, always presented as “the political activist”, always presenting the anti-Nizam point of view. It was also a manifestation of the very warning he told the staff- any political statement made will be directly contradicted by him, even if that means he has to make a pro- Nizam statement. Thus, the tone for the theatrics of the night, and the rest of the week, were set, and was felt not only in Omar’s speech, but in the Egyptian representative’s speech in which he emphasized Egypt’s role as a host country, much to the chagrin of the staffers who felt as though they were paying homage to a government they did not necessarily agree with, and that was seen as increasingly unfriendly towards them as Syrians. However, when the invited Iraqi representation was invited to speak, his overtly pro-military and pro-Egyptian government speech was met with scorn from the staffers, but also seemed to be an internal sigh of relief- at least they didn’t need to lie to manage their speeches, they can be diplomatic without losing their cause, as they saw it. The rest of the week was uneventful, the usual bands coming to sing folklorish Syrian songs, the press taking up most of

the room, and interviewing the few Syrians who are willing to be seen on TV, as threats of being seen by the Nizam paralyzes them and silences public displays of dissent.

But what is it about the tents that represents so much? In the previous chapter, we saw that for some, it was aligned with refugeeness , and as we attempted to geographically place the pictures in the gallery, the tent was synonymous with camps, its position uncritical, the SRF staffers distant from the reality they were presenting. The tent was foreign, outside, not within their vicinity or everyday- yet for Omar, the tent in Tahrir represented autonomy, revolution, hope, while the 6th of October tent signifies that shifts and tactics to survive- the new configuration of self. In a way, it is the whimsical removal of the flag from the desk, the shifting to adjust to the shell required, and the adjustments made to vernacular and semantic articulations- war becomes displacement, revolution becomes crisis, and murders become casualties. Yet, tents also reflect the rootlessness of displacement, the liminal existence that is pegged into shaky soil, threatened to be removed or expelled at a moment's mishap. The metaphorical transformation of the tent within the SRF story reflects the wider transition of SRF, and the revolutionary beginnings which gave way to state interventions is embedded in the mechanism of the organization as a whole , with the use of screens and tactics reflecting a desire to expand, to be seen as "legitimate" (read: organizational receptors of grants and aid). This not only reflects the ways in which they present themselves as an organization, but also reflects the ways in which their bodies, their tongues, their articulations of self shifts to embody certain understandings of how a "NGO" worker should present themselves.

Reading Between the Lines: The Versatility of Mission Statements

This transfiguration is first visibly felt in the introduction of SRF to the world, their mission statements. An organization's mission statement reflects their politics or rather non-politics, provides a snapshot of their focuses, and their "charitable philosophy". A typical organization will constantly tweak their mission statement, as the staffers begin learning the lingo of the field, and as the organizations expand- this formula is no different for SRF. Yet, within the various mission statements that I have read, or helped translate or formulate, an evident transformation is seen within the articulations of what is SRF to the world, what is the first impression they want the world to know about SRF. I dug through the archives of SRF, looking at brochures featuring their first projects, with faces vaguely familiar as the founders of SRF, a cross-stitch of people now scattered through the world, and read through the numbers, the ideas, and the articulations of hope stitched within them. A mission statement from 2012 which headlined the brochure read, "after the increase of crimes from the Syrian government towards the Syrian people, the size of the suffering exceeds the ability of individuals, and thus SRF was established out of a belief in not only humanitarianism, but also in belief of structured organizational work". The emphasis on collective work, alongside its insistence to remain centered in a political discourse that is adamantly anti- Nizam becomes muddled when reviewing a mission statement that came out later, in 2016, and is displayed on its website, where SRF is described as "a civil humanitarian movement that focuses on building society away from sectarian, ethnic, partisan and religious demarcations; an organization that aims to enhance the developmental aspect and seeks sustainable projects that aim to create dignified employment and develop skill sets and provide basic services to the Syrian community". This transition signals the traces of absorption that have become

familiar in the NGO-ization process, in which movements are taken, packaged, and regurgitated to emerge into a marketable, and digestible “humanitarian” cause- one the evokes sympathies while sweeping the underlying causes, and inevitable complicit-ness to such mechanisms under the rug. I have honed a detector for such progressions, as it reminded of a debate that took place at an NGO I worked for in the US, about how I, as a communications officer, should paint the illegal Israeli bombardment of Gaza, with my supervisors, both Palestinian, arguing that we cannot depict the conflict in any political terms, asking us to substitute words such as occupation, blockade and war with Gaza crisis or conflict in Gaza. My supervisors would hesitate whenever the absurdity of what they were saying was brought up, the internal conflict showing in the creases emerging in the burrowing of their eyebrows- such moments amplify the process with which one becomes absorbed. At such crossroads, the self becomes discombobulated, it is disassociated from the NGO it is working for, similarly, the cause is categorized as separate from the everyday workings of organization.

The ways in which an organization, and concurrently, its staffers, become absorbed by this NGO-ization process is subtle, yet when strung together, paint an intricate canvas. To be absorbed, to cloak oneself with not only the lingo of what is deemed professional in the NGO world, but also to seek ways to present oneself as legitimate in the neoliberal sense. One is legitimate if one can produce, and correctly fill proposals, monitoring and evaluation guides, reports. Yet the process to achieve such levels of productivity begins with the self desiring to be seen as a legitimate partner. When I first arrived to SRF as a volunteer, I was asked to conduct an assessment of the entire organization, to see where there might be weaknesses, and what complaints staffers might have. Overwhelmingly, the response from staffers was the organization lacked a clear hierarchal organization, roles were not defined, and projects were

inconsistent. While many attempts were made to put a structure, to gather finances together, to mold SRF into an organization, many of the staffers felt that not enough was being done, or was even being done in the correct manner. How can they attract outside funding, if they themselves cannot meet the requirements of the international organizations?

Aiming to Become Goliath: INGO's impact on SRF

I was at AUC New Campus when Omar called me to tell me that a project from the International Organization of Migration (IOM) had been funded. The project was IOM's idea, it was an integration program which focused on Syrian refugee integration in the Egyptian social. Often these programs come with percentage stipulations, 60% of participants must be Syrian, 40% must be Egyptian- a recent development in the projects INGO's give to SRF. In the beginning of such percentage stipulations, SRF staffers did not know any Egyptians or have any networks with Egyptians, so staff members would bring with them their doorman's family or security guards' families to fill the quota of Egyptians. This new development can be linked directly with the shift in the iqama process that I outlined last chapter, the Syrian "category" has become bankable, and as such, the Egyptian government, finding itself in a period of economic instability, aims to cash in on the international donor market that is flooding the global South with funds provided by the Global North in an attempt to hinder migration flows. This point was made clear in the meeting with the American consulate worker, whose meeting I prefaced this chapter with. She had come to get to know SRF, familiarize herself with the program, and get an overview of the Syrian community in Egypt. When Omar began asking her about US policies towards Syria and Syrian refugees, and what programming does she have in mind to support- she abruptly answered that her president, President Obama, has always had a friendly policy towards refugees, and that the US had pledged to take in the most

refugees in the upcoming year. She then went on to say the the US is more invested, now, to fund integration programs in Egypt, to ensure refugees are comfortable and in good condition. This conversation took place before talk of the IMF loan and pound flotation was even in the public sphere, shedding light on how certain powers were determined to ensure that refugee flows to the North were stopped in anyway. Yet, this shift is important in that in a short period of time, from when I first arrived in 2015, till now, SRF has transformed into the default organization for INGO implementation programs. In many ways, the inefficiency of such organizations are brought to light through this process, as is it evident that the projects are developed with no insight from the communities benefiting from such programs, and the delay with which these programs are implemented mimic bureaucratic temporalities. Often times, INGOs would come to SRF at the last minute, when very little time is left on their grant, and ask that SRF design a quick project or event for them, with subtle hints that if they help them, the INGO would fund projects SRF feel very strongly about. It is in this relationship, between the INGOs and SRF, that the rupture takes place, and the gap that exists between both organizations is molded by the stronger one, the one with the grants and can determine what type of programming takes place. Sitting in many meetings with INGO's, and hearing their requests, and seeing the ways in which SRF attempts to fulfill their requests, shows the discrepancies in such a relationship.

Returning to the phone call, Omar had called me to enthusiastically explain what the new project was about, it was an integration project for Syrian children and Egyptian “host” children. It would be a series of events, in the 10th of Ramadan, where games and activities would be planned. The first day would be attended by IOM staff members and administrators, Omar told me, and he jokingly said he advised staff members that he wanted them to be so

attentive, that if a child sneezes, he wants five volunteers surrounding him with napkins. He hoped that if these events were successful, the IOM would approve to fund the clinic in October they had been negotiating about for a year now. This tactic was one he used often, assuming that if SRF would bend a little and implement nonsensical INGO projects successfully, fill all the right paperwork and complete all their checkboxes, in return, major projects that SRF runs would be funded. In the beginning, the concessions were deemed necessary to survive, but as the projects began flowing in more and more, and more SRF staff were hired and offices were opened, a shift began happening. Before, ninety percent of SRF staff members spoke only Arabic, and were Syrian, however, as SRF began expanding and growing, the need for English speakers to engage with the INGOs emerged. As a result, administrative posts that are not on the field working directly with Syrians began being posted solely in English. When I asked why, I was told that the staff members they were seeking should be able to understand it easily and thus, the use of English is a weeding out process. This naturally shifted the dynamics to more Egyptian hires, as English is embedded in the Egyptian social in ways that it is not in the Syrian, resulting in better English speakers amongst the Egyptians. This shift in SRF hiring practices speaks to a larger shift on what SRF is now, and has sparked conversations, is it still a charitable organization, or has it switched to a business model in which projects are determined by profit and gains? These conversations take place amongst staffers, and when I bring them up to Omar, he always exasperatedly answers, “but we are an organization, what should we do?” This question posits another one, is there room, within the current neoliberal systems and new modes of governmentality, to recall Ong, to do something, to push against these new configurations? Perhaps the answer can

be found in other spaces, in other modes, but within the realm of the INGO-NGO dynamic, I simply shrug when Omar asks me.

It is important to unpack how these modes of governance emerge, with the category of “humanitarianism” as an underlying identity from which the NGOs become. Agier writes extensively on the ways that humanitarian projects employ the language of the “savior” to then be embedded in the “policing” operations of either the local or global police, harkening back to the 2015 Sudanese massacre in Cairo as an example (2010: 29). He expands on this, detailing how ideas of victimhood is then produced as a juxtaposition of a humanity that is presented as total- now we have all of humanity and we have the a nameless victim (ibid, 31). The process then turns to a hierarchical one, as vulnerabilities are measured, often times using radicalized and gendered undertones, resulting in a totem pole, where a checklist gauging the level of “victimhood” emerges- prime examples are the orphan child or the suffering single mother. This juxtaposition, of the humanitarian vs the victim, is reflective of a system that needs both factors in order to survive, as Miriam Tickten writes, “perhaps more importantly, in its current, institutionalized forms humanitarianism actually maintains inequality, in that it separates out two populations: those who can feel and act on their compassion and those who must be the subjects (or objects) of it; those who have the power to protect and those who need protection” (2016: 265). These points are important to make in order to highlight the capital that then maintains this system- as Agier points out, “the hand that heals requires a durable system- an organization, budgets, personnel” (2009: 30). It is also, why, perhaps, in all the meetings I sat in on, and participated in, it was the international staff that came in to give the initial “technical” training, and handed over the implementation to their national staff, while patronizingly reminding all parties that they will keep a watchful eye to make sure all

documents are up to “international” standards- these are no longer independent projects”, they would add, “*we work together*”- which translates to in action to- “*you work for us*”.

Becoming a Bank: Queuing for Aid

There is one project that I am always keen to volunteer on, the annual food basket distribution, done in partnership with a Saudi Arabian governmental charity organization. This project targets all the families registered in the database, who come to pick up their lot of boxes. I have volunteered at these events three years in a row, and to me, they depict the exact process I have attempted to articulate. The first year, I recall it was total chaos, people would come and argue about not being contacted, not receiving a box, etc. I was manning a computer station, where my task was to receive the passport, search up the name or passport number in the excel sheet provided, and see if the data corroborated with the information provided by the “beneficiary”. Ideally, a line would form, and the process would be smooth, and for the most part, in a chaotic way, it was. Until I had to tell a man from Aleppo, tall and with a thunderous voice, that his number was not on the list. He pounded his fist on my desk, demanding whether I wanted to disgrace him, whether my desire was to emulate the same Nizam that forced him to leave his country. “Do you bring Syrians here to dehumanize them”, he screamed, and he demanded to speak to Omar, and would not budge until Omar was brought to calm him down, and promise him that he would, indeed, receive a box, but after all those registered receive a box. While that calmed him, and he quietly accepted the decree, the words he yelled lingered in the air, and colored the rest of my interactions with those on line. A while later, after I gave a woman her card to pick up the food boxes, she smiled at me, and asked me whether the boxes would arrive with dollars in them, and if I would then take the dollars. I stopped for a moment, confused and asked her what she meant, and she repeated her

sentence, emphasizing the relationship with the dollars, before those around her shushed her, telling her there was no need for that sarcasm and she was holding up the line. She had recognized me as someone who wasn't Syrian, yet not Egyptian at the same time, perhaps because whenever I would ask for help, my first instinct would be to ask in English hence her connecting me to the greater charity complex with which she has become familiar with, and has to navigate on an almost daily basis.

The second year, they had developed a database program that would automatically connect the aid allocation into their file, and was a departure from the paper and excel sheet databases they had. The system was established after a series of chaotic distributions took place, and as the Egyptian political climate towards Syrians began improving, SRF was able to be more visible; as a result, SRF conducted a Cairo wide registration campaign that targeted Syrian families, and archived the city of origin, the date of entrance, and any health conditions, special social conditions, and financial situation of each family. This was all kept under a file number assigned to the family, which they now must present, alongside a passport or UNHCR card to receive the box. It went smoothly the second year, as transaction after transaction took place, its smooth process going so well that Bassem, doing his rounds to make sure everything was going well, smiled at me and told me, "it's as though you're sitting at a bank, isn't it?" Which seemed fitting at that time, for what do banks represent, as the gatekeepers of capitalistic systems that are entrenched in the ways in which SRF, its staffers, and by extension, me as a local volunteer aim to emulate in the name of efficiency? For something to be as smooth as a bank, it must first be reduced to a number, a concoction of paperwork, and the transaction must be as distant and alienated as possible- how is *"yes, your number is here, your paperwork is complete, please give me your card, I have stamped your card, please go pick up your food*

box”, any different from “*please provide your account number, may I see an id, everything seems okay, here is your loan /withdrawal/ deposit slip, thank you, come again?*” Simultaneously, how am I, any different from the bank teller, who embodies the system with the constant tapping away at a computer, the registering, and the anticipated nod of approval or disapproval? In the actualization of professionalism, the process of alienation between teller and customer, between beneficiary and volunteer, of humans becoming numbers, does absorption begin.

The third year, and the year in which I have began being acutely aware of observing motions, semantics, process, a noticeable shift happened. In the opening event of the food box distribution (a first), a panel was invited to speak, with donors, the UNHCR, and Plan International all given time to speak about their role in the Syrian refugee crisis, about Egypt’s role as a host country, and the donor’s intention behind such a donation. Hosted in a hotel, the first distribution was a ribbon cutting of sorts, and the beneficiaries sat and had to listen to this session before the line opened to process their numbers, passports, and stamp their cards for pick up. The staff and volunteers, including my sister and I, were formally dressed as part of the uniform, and all staff members from all the offices were requested to attend. We were told to anticipate media, and that media coverage is expected for the entire duration of food basket distribution. As people were coming and going smoothly, my sister told me an Iraqi refugee with her son approached her to see if they could get a food basket, only to be turned away because she was not Syrian or Syrian-Palestinian, and the donor had stipulated that this aid was to go to Syrians only. The other events flowed, and were planned and framed with the media coverage as priority, places of distribution were changed last minute if the place was not deemed media-ready, leaving staff members scampering to organize and notify the beneficiaries of the address change to ensure their arrival. One event that stood out was one in

central Cairo, when the distribution was moved from an office to a wedding hall the night before distribution, and when the beneficiaries arrived, they needed to wait for at least an hour because everything was pushed back due to the sudden change. Once they began lining up, the spaces between the volunteers who were taking the registration numbers, and those lining up to provide the numbers was about 5 feet, due to the large wedding tables that were used as registration desks. This resulted in those providing the paperwork needing to lean across, to hand the papers, some straining due to the crowd and the space- and in that interaction, I saw the volunteers and staff members transfer into hardline bureaucratic workers, speaking with the “beneficiaries” curtly and not budging when paperwork was missing (as opposed to previous years). It seemed to me an odd phenomenon, because in their curt responses, the glistening of their eyes as they shake their heads, I imagined how these faces might be similar to the faces they have to face when they are attempting to get the iqama- the negotiations from the beneficiaries emulating the repeated requests they, and anyone needing to deal with bureaucracy is familiar with. Amal, the head of the projects and organizer of such an event, was the same Amal that was debating whether to use the “refugee” hat to get her daughter’s school registration form. These contradictions must be seen in light of what absorption does to the self- Amal worried about her job, about the success of the project, about how SRF would look like in front of the donors, and how the press would see such an event—> in that moment, she was in survival mode, one that requires all other notions of the self to reconfigure to what SRF needs to survive. This reconfiguration is not unique to Amal, and can be traced in Omar, in Bassem, in the staff members, and in the volunteers such as myself. When we need to put on the hat of the “official SRF”, we must think of how we can let SRF survive, as it is always at the

brink, as its precarious position as a Syrian organization always waning any desires to step outside in favor of protecting SRF.

Yet, as an entity that deals with Syrians closely in Cairo, SRF has established itself as one of the most prominent and strongest representations of Syria organizations in Egypt. And while this is not lost on the Egyptian officials, its role within the Syrian communities seems to be one that is met with distrust, as rumors are constantly abound of millions of dollars being embezzled, of donor money not reaching the community as it should (this accusation is also leveled to the UNHCR and any organization that deals closely with the communities). These accusations are oftentimes laughed at, becoming a punchline that is constantly repeated in the staff break times and in outings- yet, to me, it speaks to how power is imagined in relationship to the NGO. The various community forums that exist on social medias hold SRF accountable and oftentimes, the moderators of such forums, who have emerged to act as mediators between the Syrian NGOs and the Syrian social, reach out to Omar or other staff members to confirm, requiring meetings with staff members to understand whether these allegations are true. At the same time, the power dynamics are still clear and hierarchal, and SRF produces certified press releases, with the SRF stamp and Omar's signature (ala presidential style), to discredit and denounce such allegations. The press release reflects the ways in which SRF is seen by the various beneficiaries and communities, and as it begins to engage in verifying paperwork (by requesting to see passports, by producing id numbers to engage with SRF, etc), as an additional angle of sovereignty that must be navigated and negotiated. In many ways, the staffers in SRF see themselves as representatives of a certain understanding of the Syrian community, as negotiators on their behalf, and thus, as this demarcation is drawn, so is the

undoing of the understanding of what SRF's role is; as it becomes muddled with the various roles it takes on and negotiates.

Embodying the State: The Ngo-ization of Death

I was sitting in the office, surrounded by the rest of the staff quietly doing their tasks. Today, I was volunteering with the orphan files, ensuring all the documents required to finally provide them aid are there. This was the third time the orphan papers have been returned by the donor for rearrangement to fit a new standard they established. First page: application form with bio-data (including father's cause of death), second page: child's government ids, third page: Mother and/or caregiver's id, fourth page: school attendance sheet, and final page: Father's death certificate. Each file comes with the child's shiny, passport-sized picture attached. Often times, the scattered files show images of children resembling each other, similar eyes, or a similar crook of a smile, with further investigation indicating that they are siblings. Curiosity often won me over, and I spent more time than the rest of the staff reading the causes of deaths, the year it took place and imagining how old that child must have been when their father passed away because of execution, or airstrike, or a heart attack. Some files had their father's picture attached, and I would try to compare the picture to the child, to see whether they had inherited their father's smile, or eyebrows, or face shape. And so I sat, mumbling to myself: application form, ids, mom's id, school, death certificate- complete- application form, ids, mom's id, school, death certificate- complete- application form, ids, mom's id, school, death certificate- complete. This mechanical routine continued until I froze at the image that appeared in front of me - it was a man, lying on his side, with a close up to his bloody face. It was provided in lieu of a death certificate. I turned to Amal, who is in charge of the orphan files, and asked her to tell me how to proceed, how this fits in with the categories

we were organizing. She explained to me that death for Syrians may represent the end for the person, but until his family can verify it, they cannot benefit from any services offered to orphans. However, since many times, the fathers were killed while they were combatants, or in a way that might implicate the Syrian state, death certificates become impossible to procure. Thus families resort in carrying pictures of their dead, or a video if they have a youtube link, or file of the execution- and they present it when asked to provide proof that the father is dead. These documents and files are then taken to the person in the organization that verifies claims of the dead, by checking them against official websites that documents the names and cause of death. Once verified, Omar signs the death certificate, which is recognized by the NGOs and schools the orphans apply to.

Leila recalls when they were registering the orphans in the beginning of the process, and she was detailing the requirements to the 16 year old applicant, indicating that proof of death was a requirement. Two days later, she arrived to the office with two pictures, one which had her father's decapitated head, and the other his head with his body in the background. She recalls the nonchalant way in which the girl presented the pictures- stating, "here, is my father, may God rest his soul". The staffer was stunned in silence, only quietly whispering "your father?" She recalls breaking down after the girl left. Other staffers recount their own stories, as well as the desensitization process such an ordeal takes on them as workers whose end goal is to ensure the paperwork is complete and ready to move on to the next process. "It makes the process faster", one shrugs. Leila says she's always shocked in the first second, and feels goosebumps- however, when its several cases after the other, she begins to see them as imaginary, as events that happened elsewhere, to other people- "human worth has become nothing, and this is what remains of it".

“Only the dead have seen the end of war” (Plato); the living, on the other hand, must find ways to confront their lives, and ways to confirm their dead. With the numbers of the dead rising daily, the verification process has proved to be a bureaucratic monster of its own. While many deaths are verified, so many more have slipped through the cracks, and families are left attempting to find ways to verify the dead. They do so using various methods, namely website hunting to ensure their fathers have died. This act of verifying the dead lays bare the very violent act of the sovereign attempting to display its power by rendering the dead bare. The horizontal process that emerges to fill the cracks left by power’s lack of recognition of the dead asks what becomes of the sovereign once it no longer fulfills the functions it is defined by—namely, when it no longer arranges life and death. How is sovereignty then mimicked, or renegotiated by other players so the everyday lives of those rendered bare by the state can go on? What impact does working in the field of documenting and verifying the dead have on the subjectivities and the self articulation of the SRF staffers.

The process of documenting their father’s death, of carrying the visual representations of the dead bodies as proof of the event taking place, is crucial in not only attempting to analyze how subjectivity is made and negotiated, but also how power disciplines subjectivities—forcing them to then seek ways to find alternative modes of sovereignty. How do the dispossessed remember? How do the dispossessed remember those the state has rendered bare— “who owns memory, and who or what is dispossessed of the the rights and rites of memorability” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 174)? The relationship between the sovereign and the citizen, in the Hobbesian understanding, lies in the ways that “life [is] always exposed to a threat that now rests exclusively in the hands of the sovereign” (Agamben, 2000: 5). This threat, when manifested, is translated in the ways resistance is managed, and dealt with. In Syria,

those who rebelled, or were in areas that rebelled, threatened not only the sovereign's understanding of themselves, but also became the center, the obsession of the state and its mission to bring back what was left- to force them into inclusion, because only they should have the power to exclude. However, once these bodies are killed, they are rendered bare, for in their death, they cannot rejoin the sovereign and are thus rendered useless. While Agamben's argument focused on the actual living, the way the Syrian state deals with their victims renders them bare in their death, creating a new category of homo sacre- bare death. Bare death is death that has been left untethered, and in the grey shadows of limbo, and the politics that ensue in not recognizing the dead lays bare to the very relationship between the sovereign and the body.

For death to be recognized, it must be documented, and one must go through the process of government bureaucracy: a doctor's note, a state seal, and a file number- then, and only then, will the body be recognized as dead, and whatever benefits the living gain from such an event can emerge. However, when the aggressor is the State themselves, and when the cause of death is public execution, gun fire, bombing, etc., Syrian authorities have stopped issuing death certificates for the dead, punishing them for defying the divinity of the state, and will thus render them as nonexistent in their death. The websites are run by netizens who fill the gaps of certification that the state leaves open, as they scrounge for any pictures or execution clips that show the people who have been killed, and they list them by area so that families desperate for any news can identify them. Once they are lucky/ unlucky enough to be able to identify/ confirm their death, they print out screenshots of the pictures, or download the videos on their phones to carry with them as they navigate official state mechanisms, in hopes that this will be recognized in lieu of an actual death certificate. Thus, bare death's status

is transferred to the living, who must embody the person who exists outside of the sovereign, until they are able to find ways for the death to be articulated and recognized.

The role SRF has taken to assist the families in recognizing their dead also speaks to a very significant shift in the way the state has transitioned the subjectivity of those who no longer seek its recognition. It is important to note, however, that seeking alternative mechanisms that mimic the state's function cannot be read as refusal-an outward rejection of the state- but rather an escape route. The families need aid, and SRF is required to verify that they need it, as funding hinges on this, and a cornerstone of that recognition is paperwork. Paperwork determines whether you are to be included in the aid package and final budget, or not, whether the system recognizes you or not. The families bring the pictures of their dead to the SRF, which must then turn it over Abdul, their IT researcher, who scourges the same websites the families claim they got the pictures from, to verify that they are dead, and they are indeed the fathers. These websites are run by the community collectives in the non-Nizam areas in Syria, currently based in Idlib. Once verified, Abdul gives this information to the staff member who writes out the death certificate, to be handed to Omar, who then signs and seals the death certificate. Now, it is a recognized death, and the families may receive aid. The role of Omar becomes that of the sovereign, granting life, and "killing someone with a stroke of a pen", Leila quietly comments. By taking over the roles of the state, he reproduces the same power dynamics. Only through him may one be verified, and only through him may one be green lighted to receive aid. It is particularly interesting to see the ways in which the Omar does not see himself as the sovereign, but rather as the anti-sovereign, one who must take up the roles of the state for people's lives to become smoother, one who functions in the state of "suspended violence", a space that "preserves not the law but its very suspension, and it

constitutes not a new law, but a no-law situation... law has not been abolished altogether, but merely suspended” (Brown, 2010: 31). By becoming the law, however temporal that category is granted to him, he becomes the nomos, the producer “of political order through spatial recognition” (ibid: 45). Yet, he still articulates his wariness of the responsibility of such a role, and thus refuses to produce a death certificate unless it has been verified completely.

For a sovereign to exist, it must be recognized. Therefore, the ways in which other NGO’s recognize the legitimacy of the the death certificates issued by SRF showcases how there is a new articulation of what it means to be a State, and what functions as a state now. It also provides a muddier image of how the nation state system today is waning, and is being tested, or pushed aside. How life, once deemed bare death, must find avenues to be tethered to a system that renders them included, and as a result, recognized and in which the hierarchy of citizenship is restored. With this restoration, the dead are recognized, and the living are finally able to navigate a chartered path, which in many ways, the aid mechanism and governance system paves for them.

While listening to the staff members discuss the process of verifying death, and their various roles in it, I asked them how they coped with it, and for many, dissociation is the tool they used. Leila spoke of imagining it happen in a different realm, a different reality in which human life is worth very little, because if she associated it with herself, or her people, she would not be able to function, or continue with her task of filing the proper paperwork and requesting the needed documents. This alienation, whether from Omar distancing the power the stroke of his pen possesses, the IT staffer seemingly doing the task that no one else has the heart to do, Leila who has to file and call the families to request proof of their dead, Amal, who determines whether, after all of this, the family may receive aid- manifests itself in the

semantics they use to discuss such a phenomenon, and while they do speak of disassociation, they connect it to themselves, and how this is the story of Syria, and their story as Syrians. To them, this is what it means to be Syrian today: a state of precarious living. You need to fill the shoes of your government, which results in creating a barrier between the one who is legitimate in the new system, and the one who seeks legitimacy. By separating themselves from the people's pictures they are seeing, they are alienating themselves from having to feel or mourn their dead, but also allows them, I think, in a much more broader sense, to alienate themselves from the reality that this could have been their reality- and in some ways, is. As many of SRF's staffers left, in some capacity, because of the war, they thus face a double dilemma of needing to see themselves reflected in the practices of "killing" through the verification process and through their own implicit act of demanding the dead be recognized in order for aid to be provided.

By not recognizing the dead, a parallel system that foregoes the state emerged, and resulted in what can be described as the NGO-ization of death. It becomes NGO-ized because it seemingly appears to only serve the purpose of receiving aid, but at the same time, makes a statement to how the state has failed to protect its citizens- first by killing them, and secondly, by rendering them bare in death. The resulting dynamics between those who seek recognition, those who are recognized as legitimate power, and those that have to navigate both systems in their everyday illustrates a world that is increasingly in flux, in becoming- a world that is formed by the immediacy of today, in remembrance of the systems of the past. While the nation state, as a concept, might be waning, it still manifests itself in the way people seek its recognition, or recognition from something similar. I simply recognize this assemblage with a soft "amen" to the daughter's prayer.

“We change shells to survive, but we don’t lose ourselves”: Ngo-ization as tactic

Perhaps it was fitting that towards the end of my fieldwork, I found myself sitting with Leila, Omar, Bassem, and Abdul, organizing a final (for me) community dinner. While we were sitting, Bassem was recalling a visit he and Omar made to another Syrian organization which had been growing for the past year. This organization was established by wealthy Egyptians, and the marketing team has succeeded in targeting the wealthier communities in the 6th of October, its target programmatic area of focus. They were invited to an event that had celebrity chefs, and was highly aesthetically pleasing- as was seen through their marketing, event setup, and event ambience- yet, Bassem scoffed at their attempts to emulate what he saw as faux notions “etiquette” and “class”, as he said, losing, in the process, in his opinion, the human touch, which he asserts still made SRF unique. I asked him whether he thought SRF still had that human touch, since it has grown at the rate it had. He was very affirmative, as was Omar, but when I turned to Leila to ask her what she thought, she told them, to their surprise, that she felt that the human touch was lost long ago. As one of the oldest members in the organization, coming as a volunteer soon after she arrived in Egypt, she mentioned how the magic she felt in the beginning is lost, filled instead with an obligation to go to work, to fill in paperwork, to meet requirements— even the staff has lost its familial feeling, she said, and she no longer feels excited as before. “Still, we are not like the other organizations, we still have a cause”, Omar argued, to which Leila conceded and agreed. It should be noted that while Leila is on the field everyday, Omar and Bassem assume administrative roles, perhaps explaining the disconnect between both.

Yet, this triggered a conversation about whether NGO-ization is the correct path to help the “Cause”, with Omar insisting that while it might not be the ideal path, it is the path with

which one must accept to tread on, as all other paths are either too radical or too complicit. It is the path, to him, where he can negotiate the terms with which to help his community, as he said, without resorting to helplessness and doing nothing. He mentions the trend of activists who have trailed off into immobility, drowned in sorrow of what was lost and the inability to be active- to be productive is to bend with the tides, and not to “surrender to darkness”, he states. But to bend with the tide is not to become the tide, one must never forget, his internal politics and goals, he explains. “Can one remain true to such ideals”, I ask, “within systems that have been built to break them?” “What other choice do we have?”, Omar responds. What other choices does one have? As different screens are put, as subjectivities are made and remade, as survival is contingent on appeasing on some level, and ngo-ization on the other, the room for constantly reconfiguring oneself is found in the grapplings of notions of the human touch, of the cause, of not surrendering to the darkness. Power to those who have been able to find ways in which to hold onto their ideals in the face of such giants, and power to those who have given up the fight, because life is a series of making and unmaking, and sometimes, embracing the status quo is easier on the soul than resisting it.

Chapter 4- Silences of Memory and Refrain as Antidote

“Cities are smells: Acre is the smell of iodine and spices. Haifa is the smell of pine and wrinkled sheets. Moscow is the smell of vodka on ice. Cairo is the smell of mango and ginger. Beirut is the smell of the sun, sea, smoke, and lemons. Paris is the smell of fresh bread, cheese, and derivations of enchantment. Damascus is the smell of jasmine and dried fruit. Tunis is the smell of night musk and salt. Rabat is the smell of henna, incense, and honey. A city that cannot be known by its smell is unreliable.

Exiles have a shared smell: the smell of longing for something else; a smell that remembers another smell. A panting, nostalgic smell that guides you, like a worn tourist map, to the smell of the original place. A smell is a memory and a setting sun. Sunset, here, is beauty rebuking the stranger.

But to love the sunset is not, as they say, one of the attributes of exile.

Memory, your personal museum, takes you into the realms of what is lost. A sesame field, a plot of lettuce, mint, a round sun that falls into the sea. What is lost grows in you and in the sunset, which grants what is distant the attributes of paradise and purges it of any defect. Whatever is lost is worshipped”.

-Mahmoud Darwish, In the Presence of Absence, trans. Sinan Antoon (235)

“Aleppo itself was ephemeral as the act of forgetting; anything which remained of its true form would become a lie, reinvented by us day by day, so as not to die.”- Khaled Khalifa, No Knives in this Kitchen 2016

We had just finished setting out the food for the community Iftar I helped organize by tapping into my networks back home in New Jersey. It was easy to gather money for Syrian “refugees” in Cairo in the United States, as the concept of aid, and perhaps perpetual guilt surrounding our implicit hand in their displacement vis-a-vis our tax dollars, is something quite easy to leverage. With the amount of money gathered, we could hire Al-Maarashly band, a renowned cultural band in Syria, to entertain us for the night. The events usually ranged from 200 to 500 people; the largest event, an outlier, used several organizations’ funds to host over a thousand people. This particular event was one of the cozier ones, I always preferred those, as people become comfortable and a more communal environment emerges. As the music took over the entire outdoor field we had rented out, the night became cheerful, with the guests taking turns dancing dabkeh (a form of step dancing) from different areas of Syria-

the impromptu dance troupe from Aleppo won for most coordinated and enthusiastic. I later received a spontaneous comedic lesson on how to dance as a Halabi: “first, you pierce a star in the sky with your eyes, then you stomp the cockroach to the front, and finally cup your hands as though you’re carrying a bowl, bringing you arms in to your chest and moving them out towards the sky to this rhythm: cold bowl, hot bowl”. Cursed with being an uncoordinated dancer since birth, as well as the dancing being an all male affair, I instead looked around me at the scene, everyone was happy, clapping and cheering. Egyptians walking around the rest of the park joined in on the fun, video taping and asking- “Sourya?”, “Sourya”? It was a jubilant night, but as I gazed around, I glanced Amal crying quietly nearby. When I asked her why, she said, “this takes me back to *Al-Sham* and the days of *Al Sham*, God knows if we will ever be able to go back”. Murmurs of comfort came from the Syrians sitting around us, with others tearing up as well- from their several words of comfort, two stood out to me, “at least we have each other in our *ghourba [exile]*” and “May Allah return us to it soon”.

Oftentimes, as I attend events, conversed, or listened to discussions, the phrase, “*not like Syria*” garnished so many of the sentences I heard, usually punctuating descriptions of mundane everyday experiences; whether the topic is food, art, during strolls down streets of Old Cairo, which “has the potential to be Old Damascus, but isn’t or the retelling of bureaucratic experiences. The way this phrase, as well as the constant return to romantic nostalgia about a “Syria that was”, shapes the way that Syria remembrance makes and remakes the “present” everyday lives of the Syrians I met. However, this constant reference to Syria usually alters the environment, as some people become vocal about home, while others become noticeably silent. I recall a walk I once took with Fayez, who is from Damascus and originally came to Egypt to study engineering before he became a SRF staff member. We

discussed the concept of “not like Syria”, as I had noticed it frequently being stated. He exasperatedly commented on how the Syrians here have a “selective memory”, choosing to forget that poverty existed there as it did in Egypt, to forget that many streets had garbage, to forget the many ways Syria was a lot like Egypt. To him, they wanted to remember and hold on to a romanticized image of Syria, one that existed, he said, in some ways, but not in the exaggerated way it is described. In many ways, the displacement of Syrians has resulted in a hegemonic, albeit romantic, memory of Syria to emerge, in which moments of solitary contradiction act as ruptures to this understanding.

It is in these ruptures that I begin to shape an understanding of the linkages between Syrian memory and their everyday, similar to Feldman’s (2006) work surrounding refugees in Gaza, I aim to move away from temporally historicizing memory to “exploring how the repeated articulation of memories participates in and animates a refrain of home that shapes people’s experiences of their communities, of themselves, of their past and of their future” (15). I also analyze the ways in which hegemonic narratives are established, and what can be found in the silences it produces, and that manifests themselves in the oftentimes subtle ruptures that take place. This chapter explores both these concepts by analyzing the ways Syria as a memory point is expressed and negotiated in the everyday, by analyzing the particular songs that are chosen and played during most community and personal events and gatherings, as well as discussions on the notion of return. This nostalgic longing, I argue, is also in a way disciplinary in the sense that it attempts to create one story of what Syria was/is; only to be negated by the individual instances/silences that showcase the facedness of such stories. Both of them analyze these viewpoints as part of the larger process of undoing moments that grapple with the ultimate undoing of the notion of homeland: the moment the magnitude of

displacement begins to settle in. From that magnitude, I also analyze how navigation is shaped by such notions of memory, how do Syrians see themselves in contrast to the Egyptian social; on the other hand, how does the Egyptian social construct the Syrian category?

To refrain from home, Feldman describes, is to reproduce it. Homes are always in the making, as they are reproduced and reconfigured by people's experiences (ibid, 13). She uses refrain for its lyrical purposes, as a refrain is a repeated line that usually appears and repeated through poems or songs- similar to how "not like Syria", peppers conversations. Yet, what does that phrase signify? When something is "Not like Syria", it gives room for there to be a fixated understanding of Syria. Because to admit that something has/ may become "like Syria", or that perhaps the "Syria" they describe might only exist in their memory of it, is conceding that Syria has been lost, and a tangible return to it might not be in the cards. Feldman describes this act as a tactic to bridge the distance between the territory that has been lost, and the new homesteads being made in Gaza- to find a way to bond "the territory, the objects and the encounters ... [that were] irretrievably lost" by using "repetitions of narrative and practice [to help] hold chaos at bay" (41). However, it is not just loss of Syria that emerges, but I also see in their narratives the dialectical interchange of the "good" Syria and the "bad" Syria. The good Syria narrative emerges in the moments of refrain, in the phrases they use, and longing for a romanticized past; juxtaposed against that, the binary of the bad Syria emerges. The Bad Syria is the justifications of why they left, how the system could not hold itself, why the revolution should have taken place. Here, the horrors of Al-Assad's regime emerges, and you hear the stories of extreme surveillance, torture, threats, and imprisonment that found its way in their everyday lives in Syria. In this contradiction, the romanticized image that articulations of

memory attempts to illustrate is shattered, as it brings to light the question of legitimacy and narrative, whose narratives are being spotlighted, and whose narratives are being silenced.

Paradise Lost: The Homogenization of Collective Memory

Chaos is held at bay, it seems, by the very fine threads of a hegemonic narrative of not only what Syria was, but also the individual responsibility of the people to what Syria will become. These threads tend to be woven through very individual exercises, but yet shift and become interrelated when the people must constantly place themselves in a negotiation with the larger community or group. This negotiation paves the path for a hegemonic production of what it means to be Syrian and what memory in Syria means. Collective memory transcends individual memory, and the social transcends the individual, as well as shapes that dialectical relationships as one that is ingrained in the contemporary moment (Connerton, 1984). In the instance when the nation state- Syria- is no longer able to control how memory and official understandings of the past is narrated, particularly when displacement as a result of the revolution and subsequent events claw at this narrative and shed light to the “alternative facts” of its past, the diaspora of such displacements take on the role of the nation state in creating a hegemonic “myth” of Syria. “Memory is a collective function”, writes Maurice Halbwachs (1941), that is processed through an effort to reconstruct and reconfigure, an effort to distort the past to produce a greater coherence in the present (183). However, while that implies a sinister, almost premeditated, understanding of memory, I believe it is useful to see this “tactic”, this need to produce a unified collective memory, as something linked to the very ways in which individuals place themselves as part of the larger social. Since Syria, as a territory, is

unreachable (for some), the need to remember seemed important to those at SRF, because that is how they configure their understandings of themselves.

At the 6th of October tent I wrote about in the previous chapter, Souad gave a presentation on the history of refugeeness, and began her speech with a poem that praised the different areas of Syria. Her poems and speeches are usually met with eye rolls and smirks amongst the SRF staff, as she is seen as exaggerating this image of Syria to a point that is almost exploitive, catering to attempts to establish an infallible Syria. In her presentation on Syrians' contribution to the world, she retold the story of a princess, Oruba, who escaped Syria because of an invading army. The princess made her way to the North, and a prince saw her and fell madly in love with her, and because those in the North could not pronounce Oruba properly, the term Europe emerged. To Amal and Leila, and the other staffers sitting around me, this was the straw that broke the camel's back to them, as they laughed and sarcastically declared to me, "don't you know, us Syrians are the reason the world exists, if it wasn't for us, Banan, you wouldn't be here". Of course, Souad was adding her own take to the Greek myth of the kidnapping of the Phoenician princess Europa by the lovelorn Zeus, with the entire region eventually being named Europa in her honor as her offspring ruled various cities and she was seen as the mother of Europe (Mark, 2010). While Souad's retelling of Syrian history might dwell on the dramatic side, it speaks to the rosy image that is produced collectively, and publicly addressed. The very same staffers who mocked Souad, had in previous occasions taken in the very same process of producing an image of "paradise". In many ways, collective memory here functions in lieu of the nation state, filling its absence and attempting to create a unified hegemonic narrative; but one must also ask, in the effort to create one History, what

and who is being kept out? What multitudes are being silenced, in the spirit of Trouillot (1995), in the making of a singular “past”?

The collective is ruptured, for example, when the topic of Syria’s Kurdish community is brought up. Fayez and Qusay are best friends, both from Damascus, both young men in their early twenties. Qusay also has Kurdish roots, something his father did not tell him, he told me, until he was older. When I asked why, he said because he didn’t want me to have loyalty to a cause that might stir trouble for me (his father had been exiled to Saudi Arabia in the 80’s, where Qusay spent most of his life). This revelation caused Qusay to look more into his Kurdish roots, and he now says he ascribes to the idea that the Kurds have a right to an independent nation, or at the very least, he asserts, Arabness should be removed from the national Syrian rhetoric- it should no longer be the Arab Republic of Syria. Qusay told me this when we were having coffee alone one day, not in the presence of the others at SRF. These “stories of the self” (and the wider group) must be seen as being produced in relation to different and changing social audiences, and also as containing ‘historical accounts’ of specific individuals and groups”, and as a result, the conversation surrounding Qusay’s Kurdishness, should be seen in the ways in which he feels comfortable to articulate it to me, yet remains silent about it in the greater discussion of Syria. Later, as I was sitting with Fayez, Mohamed, and Noura at a cafe, I asked questions about refugeeness, how they see themselves, and place themselves with regards to that discussion. The topic of the revolution emerged, naturally, and Fayez asserted that a return to what once was is impossible, given that groups of people are coming out of the woodwork to change the makeup of the understanding of the Syrian nation, citing the Kurds as an example. This triggered a heated debate, as Mohamed, disagreed, saying that Kurds have always been loyal to Syria and to Syrian-ness. Fayez asserts that is not the

case, citing how Qusay, with all his appearances of “Syrian-ness”, holds the belief of an independent Kurdistan, and the inclusion of other languages in Syria’s recognized official languages. Mohamed remained silent, before agreeing with Qusay’s stance. He cites years of institutional discrimination and silencing of the Kurdish population in Syria, and he believes granting them the right to either be included in the national narratives as Kurds or their call for independence to be legitimate. This might seem like a discussion between friends, but what’s also at interplay is the notion of Syrian-ness that is being discussed. Mohamed is from Deir Al Zour, an area close to the Iraqi borders, and known for its tribal affiliations; Mohamed himself traces his roots back to Iraq. In conversations, the Beduins are always the butt of the joke in a way that is othering, their traditions cast as foreign. This moment of contention showcases the very process I have been attempting to describe. The sentiment behind the utopia of “not like Syria”, with which the Syrian narrative in the diaspora seem to center themselves, unravels in these moments of “just like Syria”, in the isolation and othering process that always seemed to exist, yet silenced in the greater discussion of the nostalgic waxing of Syria.

I Sing You to Me: Singing Displacement// The Silences Between the Notes

The first time I heard the Syrian version of “*Jana Jana Jana (Paradise, Paradise, Paradise)*”, I was at Azhar park, with students from SRF’s Educational Center. There is a section in Azhar park that overlooks the children’s playgrounds- it’s built to look like the steps of an outdoor Roman theater, and circles the edge of the play area. Usually, parents sit there, to keep an eye on their children as they play. The children all gathered on the steps, and were joined by the teachers and volunteers. It was quite a sight- the steps were filled with cheering

children, connecting their arms over shoulders, as they began to take group pictures. Eventually, the children began singing, and their teachers joined, bellowing the words of “Jana Jana”, stilling all activities in the park, as onlookers gathered and swayed to the tune of the song. This particular song follows me throughout my fieldworks, as it is ritualistically performed at all the events, from the amounts of time I have heard it, I can almost repeat it verbatim. Jana Jana is an Iraqi song, rooted in the war and subsequent displacement of Iraqis. Its words center around the notion of nation as heaven, that “even your [the nation’s] fire is heaven”. This song, amongst others that are repeated, are not particularly unique in the sense of displacement it evokes, as the songs often predate the Syrian conflict and find their Levantine roots in the Palestinian and Iraqi displacements. Rather, the Syrian version of this song deserves a deeper consideration, as the lyrical adjustments parroted by the children, and the rest of us, carry meanings rooted in the revolution’s attempt at clawing the national Syrian narrative, but then becoming part of the collective diasporic hegemonic narrative.

The Syrian version of “*Jana, Jana*” was sung by Abdul-Basit Al-Sarout, the former Syrian soccer team’s star goalkeeper, who turned revolutionary from Homs. He was dubbed the “hoopoe bird of the Revolution”, and the “guard of the revolution”. His status as a revolutionary was cemented as he lamented and mourned the sequential deaths of his uncles and four brothers, as well as having survived three assassination attempts. His symbolic song and title, is even more meaningful when his story is seen in the context of the Nizam’s targeted assassinations of those they deem to be influential in the Syrian revolutionary social. He is seen as carrying the torch of Ibrahim Qaqamish, the original hoopoe bird of the revolution, who was murdered by the Nizam, and had his throat torn out of him to symbolize the silencing of the hoopoe. Al-Sarout’s take on “*Jana, Jana*”, pays homage to all the martyrs of the

revolution, but also, signals out the different regions within Syria that have revolted. This regionalization is quite an experience to witness in the performance of the song in Syrian spaces, because as each region is sung, people from each corresponding region cheer and smile. It is a signaling out, it is not the collective Syria in that moment, but rather, it is *Daraa, Hama, Homs, Halab*.

The moment of rupture, for me, begins from the song itself. The stanza pertaining to Hama goes, “*Oh Hama, forgive us/ By god, we (the Syrian people) have wronged you/ you are from us, and linked to us*”. This request for forgiveness stems from the massacre of Hama in 1981 and 1982. Hama, since the 1960’s, was a strong hold of the Muslim Brotherhood of Syria, and very anti-Baathist. This rebellion produced an uprising which was violently suppressed, and resulted in thousands of deaths; accounts of the massacre never made its way in the official national history (i.e. in school curriculums or Syrian national narratives), and was only referred to as “the events of Hama”. It has long remained a black sore in the national Syrian imagination, as the silence of the rest of the Syrians was taken bitterly by Islamist rebels from Hama, and has been a heavy load on the ways in which Syrians articulate their nostalgic longing for home- because in many ways, they are seen as implicit to the Nizam’s massacre. As harsh as that may sound, it was articulated by Rahaf, a young woman from Damascus, who told me that what is happening in Syria today, meaning the war and destruction, is “karma, because they remained silent for all these years on so many injustices”.

Thus, by silences between the notes, I mean the ways in which the romantic narrative of a Syria is reconfigured in these new spaces. Echoing Truilloit (1995), the crux of nation and the production of hegemonic narratives lies in power, and “the ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots” (xix). This invisibility

deliberately “silences” narratives that cast it in an unflattering light (such as Hama’s massacre). This calculated silence, which began in Syria, and is carried throughout the beginning of the revolution, manifests itself in the everyday lives and songs of those who sing them (particularly those born and raised in Syria) in Egypt today, many who seem to have internalized the guilt (re: Rahaf) and now, in the diaspora, are forced to address the elephant in the room head on. I bring up “*Jana, Jana*”, but a few other songs also make appearances, whether it be “*Mawtini (My nation)*”, or “*Ya Sham Arthek Ghaly Aleena (Oh Sham, your land is precious to us)*”. Both these songs are also very much linked with the other regional crises, its lyrics upholding the nation state as salvation and the ultimate goal to reach- *Mawtini* is the post-Saddam Iraqi national anthem, but growing up I have always heard it in relation to Palestine. The use of songs in the language of the everyday speak not only to the community's attempt to create it collective narrative, but also addressed the shadows of the silences that these songs evoke, as well as the centering of one’s self in the loss and displacement.

Next Year in Damascus: Return as Antidote//Disrupting the Romantic Return

Interchanged with “not like Syria” is another refrain, “inshallah [God willing], next year, we’ll all be in Syria”. It is usually said at the end of happy events, holiday greetings, or fun trips, and I gather, from how quickly it is said, it’s said out of habit. This wishful prayer for return is common amongst many displaced communities, some Palestinians say it in an almost mocking way, sarcastically, to allude to the almost impossibility of return, given the intricate Zionist regime that makes it near impossible. The Zionist regime, ironically, took the Jewish prayer “*Shana Haba B'yerushalayim - Next Year in Jerusalem*” literally and have since attempted to recreate the Jerusalem lost by causing the displacement of the Palestinians living there.

History is nothing if not comedic. For the Syrians around me, the talk of the return colors everything, the conversations, the imaginations, the wishful musings in car rides back from events and gatherings. It is always accompanied by a slight disturbance of the fact that it will not be the same, but the desire to return is not doubted. When one does return to Syria, like Fayez did in the summer, those in SRF who were in Egypt waited to hear what has changed, and how Syria is like, as many of them have not been there for years. His reports back were not promising, as he said everything has changed- the spirit of the place, the ways in which he walked the streets and negotiated his everyday was different. Being a young man, he is always in danger of being conscripted into the army, so his parents always made sure he never left the house alone, or by foot. This lack of mobility colored all his experiences, yet he still spoke of relocating back to Damascus eventually, unless he can find a master's program in Europe.

Others who have returned for a visit shared his sentiments, stating that the Syria lost was much greater than those in Egypt can imagine. But these are the ones that can go back, people who are from a specific Damascene upper middle class. Discussions with people from areas that have experienced population exodus, like Daraya and Halab, show another story. They speak of a non-return, at least not immediately. Leila tells me, when we sit alone- these confessions are always said when we are alone- "everything has changed in Halab, its people, even its stones"; it is as though she is silently asking me, "*what do I have to return to?*" The familiar is no longer there, however, after a slight pause, she asks quietly, "but who will rebuild it if we don't go back?" She then rationalizes it by saying, "when the war is over, I will not return for five years- I cannot see Halab destructed". Others, like Islam, the head of SRF's 6th of October office who is originally from Daraya, discusses a new configuration when the mention of return is brought up.

I was sitting with Islam on a farm situated at the banks of the Nile on Al Qanatir Island. It was SRF's annual retreat, and as we were preparing the tea for everyone, I mentioned to him a Facebook status he had posted a few days earlier in which he speaks of a sense of homelessness, but not without hope. In his status, he mentions how he grew up in Syria as a child, his past, his roots are there, yet with the displacement, and after finding himself in Egypt, he grew into himself; he aligned his independence and personality to the person he became in Egypt. The Syria Islam is not the same as the Egypt Islam, and with his status, he opens the juncture in which the discussion around a becoming is centered. If Islam, the Syrian, is no longer Islam the Syrian, then what does that say about the category of Syrian? I asked him, then, if he could return to Syria, would he? His hesitation spoke to me more than the words he uttered out of duty- "would I return? Yes, to make it better, but will I want to? I don't know", he answers. Feldman (2006), who grapples with notions of return in her work, discusses the nostalgia for return from a medical lens, with nostalgia originally being cast as a condition that would be cured by the return; however, doctors soon found that the return did not prove efficient, as the problem is also a temporal one (10). Hence, it is not a territorial longing that underlines the return, its a temporal one, one that Leila silently seems to state, and the others corroborate. The homecoming might not manifest itself, but the longing for it serves as an antidote, as an escape route, a la Papadolpopus et el. against the currents of everyday reconfigurations that they experience. The need for a hegemonic narrative sheds light on the silences that have emerged in the diaspora, on the longings of return that are not quite longings any more, but rather, open ended questions.

“They aren’t Syrian”/ “They weren’t there” : Demarcations of the Collective

The way in which attempts to enunciate a collective Syrian community is usually manifested when endeavors to demarcate a true Syria. The language in which the Nawar, whom I introduced in Chapter 2, are spoken about, reflect these attempts to categorize as “other”. It is rumored within the Syrian community in Egypt that the Nawar can usually be found on Al Haram street, as they have now taken over the nightlife scene as dancers, entertainers and prostitutes. On one of the largest Facebook groups for the Syrian community in Egypt, I recall a Facebook post in which a man had taken the picture of a few beggars in 6th of October, and made a public announcement, in which he, as a “Syrian”, denounced these non-Syrians who “unfortunately” are written off as Syrians by the Egyptian social and governmental paperwork. Egyptian members of the group chimed in by explaining how they, too, have groups of nomadic people claiming Egyptianness, but are nothing but “liars, dancers, and thieves”. Here citizenship becomes intertwined by a specific moral understanding of what it means to be inside- now paperwork no longer functions as the entrance ticket, but rather shifts to a presentation of a constructed image of a “nationality” in which inclusion is predicated on morality. Yet, my encounters with the Nawar have been interesting, as they only ever approached me as beggars capitalizing by emphasizing their Syrian-ness. One instance that stands out was when I was with my friends visiting from the States at Friday prayers in Al Azhar Mosque, and right outside the exit, stood a woman, silently, holding a child and the Syrian passport against her chest. Here, the passport can be seen as a tactic, as the woman uses the passport to forcibly include herself within the collective, even if the collective refuses to acknowledge her. This resistance speaks to how the imaginary “exception” negotiates the collective, and with their refusal, become rivers which coarse through the body, to recall Daas.

Another way in which the collective is disrupted is in the subtle ways a distinction is made between the Gulf Syrian and the “Syrian-Syrian”. The Gulf Syrian is the one who was either born and raised in the Gulf, or spent a significant amount of their upbringing there. Omar and Bassem, and many other Syrians who I met inhabit this category, and the interactions in moment of tension that emerge show that the collective Syria and Syrian-ness is not what they all attempt to create. Many of the Gulf Syrians were in Egypt prior to the revolution to attend University, as Syria would not accept their Gulf degrees as complete, seeing Gulf education as subpar to the Syrian system. Hence, for those who wanted to go to med-school or any difficult technical schools, Egypt offered a better option. As a result, many of the students were in Egypt prior to the revolution, and were the best equipped to act as mediators between the incoming flows of Syrians and the Egyptian social and state. Eventually, these mediating roles became solidified as they soon became official representatives of the Syrian community, organizations, like SRF, fully governed by Gulf Syrians. Those hired, however, were mostly “Syrian Syrian”, and oftentimes in moments of tensions, the comments that emerge shed light on the imagined differences between them. Once, on our way to drop off Omar to the airport, an argument about the Syrian flag took place. Omar was insisting that the revolutionary flag must be used to represent Team Syria in a soccer tournament that was being hosted by a Qatari NGO. Fayeze, who oversaw the team, disagreed and stated that it would cast SRF in a political light, given that the Egyptian state has not recognized the flag; but after a bitter back and forth, Omar, as the CEO, emerged victorious. However, as I was driving on the car ride back (given that I had an international license, whereas Syrians could not legally drive with their Syrian license), Fayeze began complaining about the decision, “he never lived a day of his life in Syria, and yet, here he is

representing the revolution and insisting this is what revolution means- what does he know about Syria, he's never experienced the good or the bad". Fayez was alluding to Omar's status not only as the CEO of SRF, but also as the go to contact in the Egyptian media to discuss all things Syria. In the media, Omar is cast as "Syrian political activist", and he uses his time on air to bash Al-Assad and the Syrian regime. Fayez is not the first person who has spoken about this distinction, as Omar and Bassam themselves also speak of these categories, only this time, to differentiate themselves. Omar once told me, after having a fallout with a "Syrian Syrian" friend, that when Syrians came to Egypt, he discovered that "Syrians living in Egypt are very different from those living in the Gulf, we aren't like them, and that's why if you notice, all my closest friends are raised in the Gulf like me". Bassam, when I asked him on the subject, agreed with Omar, saying that due to Gulf Syrian's "exposure to more people, more concepts, more products [alluding to Syria's closed markets]" they have become more open minded and more global in their mentality, something "Syrian-Syrians" lack, according to him.

Hence, what the Nawar, Gulf Syrians, and the Kurds as I mentioned earlier, bring forth, are new lines of inquiry about how hegemonic understandings of community, and representations are predicated first on understanding that a singular collective is a myth, and what underlines the everyday workings of memory is multiplicity and an attempt to grapple at what it means to be Syrian? Who has the right to Syria? If certain characteristics are assigned to the true Syrian, what happens to this on the outside if a new Syria project was to emerge? These open-ended questions illuminate the ways that the everyday is constantly in flux, that memory and the social are active player, constantly being made and remade.

Conclusion- The Possibilities of Defragmenting

When I first returned to Egypt, in the summer of 2015, the reestablishment of the relationship with SRF seemed to be the natural flow of things, since I was feeling quite isolated and had yet to adjust to the idea of “returning” to where I seemingly had roots, while at the same time felt as though I had no roots at all. It was a contradictory moment for me, a moment in which I had “returned”, like the prodigal son, but still felt displaced, as though I was on borrowed time, on time that could not absorb my diasporic body, with the accent that sounded “*mish min hena [not from here]*”. In the junctures of these feelings, I began getting closer to the people at SRF, feeling a camaraderie, which as I read at that time, was a result of similar feelings and understandings- we were all outsiders in Egypt. For me, it seemed ordinary that I felt affinity to the community, as it reflected my own diasporic upbringing, where the collective is constantly organized around movement, and to some extent, displacement. So as I spent my first summer in Egypt planning Eid events and engaging with the SRF Syrian community closely, I began to be attuned to the way my family here in Egypt would always sum my comings and goings, and explain them arbitrarily as “*enty ray7a Sourya [you’re going to Syria?]*”, “*asl Banan ma’ah Sourya [Banan’s with Syria]*”. All the diversity of a community I was witnessing on a daily basis brushed under the category “*Sourya*”- as though their bodies have become one with the nation state.

And so, as I began traveling through these “*ray7a Sourya [going to Syria]*” and the Syrian “*jeety/ weswelty? [you made it?]*”, I felt the journey between them was always one where I readjusted the categories in my mind- or at least attempted to. It became even more muddled when I began grad school that fall- now, the Syrians I had been interacting with and getting close to were statistics and categories only recognized and discussed in terms of refugeeness

and forced displacement, they became categories spoken about through policy papers and policy recommendations. As I began exploring the politics behind the formation of categorizations, and began tracing the ways in which the complexity of “Syrian-ness” had transformed in the contemporary moment, I noticed a disjuncture between what I was observing and participating in the everyday lives of this particular community and what I was learning in my programs, as well as in conversations outside the community. Hence, my research topic emerged- within this alternate dance I was observing, of categorizations and lived experiences, of the contradictions within “fixed” attempts to understand what it means to be Syrian.

Consequently, to reflect the organic way in which my relationships and field work occurred, and to move away from what I think is a disservice to the way the community is reflected in the social (be it academic, media, or in the realm of the NGO world), I adopted an approach that looked at the everyday lived experiences as traces, and understood that within the stories I was privileged enough to hear, and the observations I was granted access to, a more muddled narrative emerges that leads to the uncoupling of binaries and categories such as “Syrian and refugee”, or even, as in the case of the Nawar, Kurds & Gulf Syrians, for example, the undoing of the binary of “Syrian and Syrian”. Rather, I found that by looking at the everyday lives as different modes of embodiments, *different hats for different moments*, a better understanding emerges about what these moments reflect- be it a complete undoing of refugeehood, or even what it means to inhibit and reconfigure yourself within the “fissures of the state” to borrow Veena Das’s description. By grasping the contradictory practices of the state within these fissures- particularly when it comes to paperwork, and the iqama (residency) process; new understandings of what a state means emerges, especially when one navigates

several manifestations, or faces of the state/states. I think it is especially interesting now, as many of the stories I pointed to in my thesis, and others as well, of those who attempted and finally received their residency permits after long processes, have been posting satirical comments on Facebook, such as “*thank god for the blessing of residency, a blessing one does not understand until they tastes it*”— or even better, a long satirical “report” Islam wrote, about what does it mean to be a Syrian who holds a residency permits: some snippets include tips like, “when you have a residency permit, you can walk as though you own the world, and when an Egyptian official asks you for it, and you can stick it in his face, proud, and he can’t do anything about it”. He ends his post by cheekily stating, “next edition, I will talk about what it means to be a Syrian with a valid passport”. How one, then “escapes”, echoing Papadopoulos et al, became an important springboard from which I approached my research, and speaks to this process of paperwork and political subjectivities.

It was particularly important for me that my research adequately reflects the ebb and flow of the particular everyday lives I was observing and was a part of. In my research, I captured fragments which I hope did my friends, and my work justice. I hope that from this research, more questions will emerge that look at the various ways not only the Syrian community configures itself, but also, the ways in which this configuration is done within the Egyptian social. A very interesting conversation can be had about social and collective imaginations between the various communities that exist, and how the “other” in this sense, is imagined. The main hope that I have, and that I used as the red thread that underlines my research, is that my research allows for different understandings around migration and community to emerge, one that moves away from solid understandings of categories such as Syrian and refugees, and embraces the lives we all live today- lives that are messy, making

room for ruptures and escape, and for moments that are fleeting, that sometimes allow themselves to be captured, or not.

Epilogue- The Mythical Return

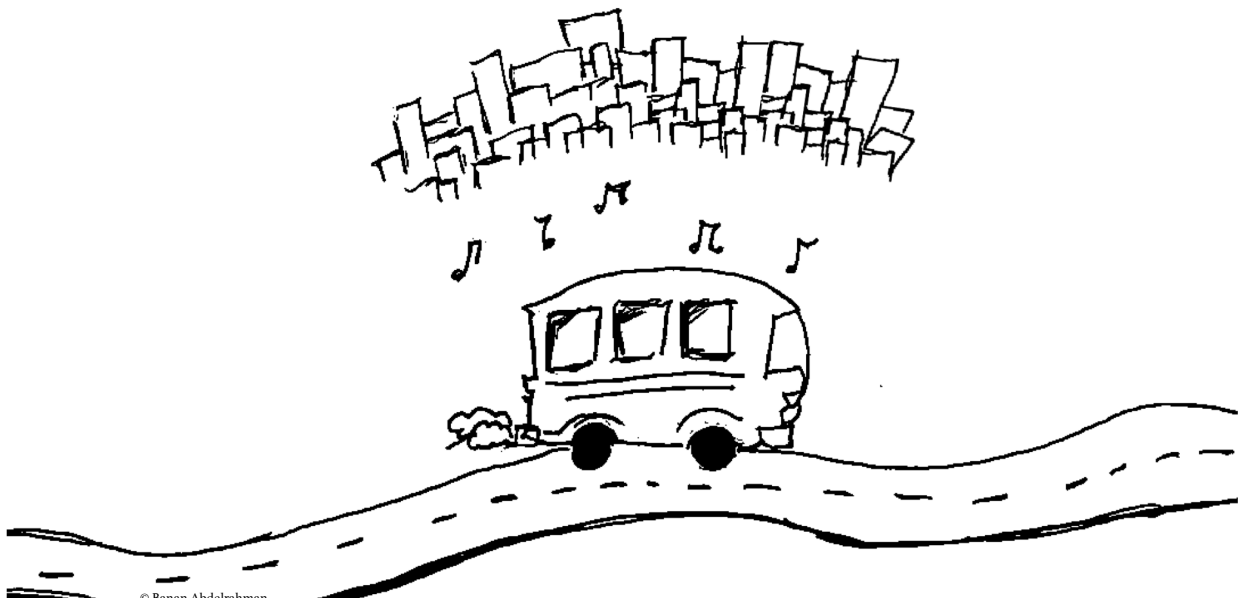
Amal and I were headed back from another event hosted by SRF's 10th of Ramadan office. As we rolled along the bumpy highway, holding onto each other for support in the cramped car, we began talking about SRF and the diversity of the people in it, hailing from all different parts of Syria. Amal turned to me, and said, "sometimes, I like to daydream of the time we all return, and we begin visiting each other. Now, since I have come here [to Egypt], I met people from all over. In Damascus, I only knew people from Damascus, only lived and dealt with people from there- and if you speak to anyone here, they will tell you the same; areas did not mix much back home."

"But now, that I know people from everywhere, I imagine myself returning and renting a bus, and traveling all over Syria to meet the friends I made, and picking them up and going to visit our other friends. We would go to Homs, Halab, Hama, Daraa- *we would go everywhere*".

"Can you imagine, all of us on a bus", she laughs, "just traveling all over Syria? You, of course, would come visit us there and you'll see all of Syria with us."

"Summer, Somewhere"
by Danez Smith (2016:355)

*no need for geography
now that we're safe everywhere.
point to whatever you please
& call it church, home, or sweet love.
paradise is a world where everything
is a sanctuary & nothing is a gun.*



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Annex

Who Am I, Without Exile?

By Mahmoud Darwish

Translated by Lady Joudah

A stranger on the riverbank, like the river ... water
binds me to your name. Nothing brings me back from my faraway
to my palm tree: not peace and not war. Nothing
makes me enter the gospels. Not
a thing ... nothing sparkles from the shore of ebb
and flow between the Euphrates and the Nile. Nothing
makes me descend from the pharaoh's boats. Nothing
carries me or makes me carry an idea: not longing
and not promise. What will I do? What
will I do without exile, and a long night
that stares at the water?

Water
binds me
to your name ...
Nothing takes me from the butterflies of my dreams
to my reality: not dust and not fire. What
will I do without roses from Samarkand? What
will I do in a theater that burnishes the singers with its lunar
stones? Our weight has become light like our houses
in the faraway winds. We have become two friends of the strange
creatures in the clouds ... and we are now loosened
from the gravity of identity's land. What will we do ... what
will we do without exile, and a long night
that stares at the water?

Water
binds me
to your name ...
There's nothing left of me but you, and nothing left of you
but me, the stranger massaging his stranger's thigh: O
stranger! what will we do with what is left to us
of calm ... and of a snooze between two myths?
And nothing carries us: not the road and not the house.
Was this road always like this, from the start,
or did our dreams find a mare on the hill
among the Mongol horses and exchange us for it?
And what will we do?

What
will we do
without
exile?

[You're] Jannah [paradise], jannah, jannah
By Allah, our homeland
Oh beloved homeland, your land is precious
Even your hell is a jannah

In your dust, we found solace, and in your arms we found
solace.

For your land, we long
We reached the summit, we reached the highest point.

Revolt Revolt Oh Daraa, In our darkness you are a candle
The People of Homs have called for your help, oh carriers of
our struggle (x2)

Homs, oh mother of Arabnes, we kissed our fear goodbye
We don't fear difficulties, we don't know difficulties.
We are Heroes, ask about us, Ask about the People of Homs

Halab, oh mother of nobles, Syria calls for you. To Jihad we
go, don't desert our nation.
How many time have you deserted us?

Oh Hama, forgive us, by God, we owe you. You are from us
and belong to us. In the Almighty, we hope. God will never
desert us.

Jisr Al Shughur and Rastan, the tune of martyrdom sings. No
matter how many you [referring rot the Nizam] kill and bury,
nations have been killed and buried,
oh Creator, we are promised Janna.

Our martyrs have not died, cheer for him oh girls. Servants
and Houris (x2)

God Willing, Janna.

From Al Raqqa to Qamishli, the heroic blood boils.
God willing, Janna.

He kills nations, and then prays [referring to Bashar Al
Assad] (x2)

Oh villain, leave us be

Circle, circle circle, oh sea gull [as opposed to vulture- which
is a bad omen], circle

Oh martyr of my nation, [you] jasmine and damask rose
Pray for us, oh family, as martyrdom is our dream.

جنة جنة جنة /// والله يا وطننا
يا وطن يا حبيب /// يا بو تراب الطيب
حتى نارك جنة

بترابك روينا /// وبأحضانك روينا
ولترابك حنيننا /// وبمجدك علينا
للقمة وصلنا /// للعليا وصلنا

ثوري ثوري درعا /// بعثامينا انتي شمعة
حمصية تنادي فرزة /// يا مسند حملنا
يا مسند حملنا

حمص يا أم العروبة /// للخوف باست توبة
ما انهاب الصعوبة /// لا ما نعرف الصعوبة
أبطال واسأل عنا /// حمصية واسأل عنا

حلب يا أم الأجواد /// سوريا لك تنادي
حي على الجهاد /// لا تخذلي وطننا
اشقد خذلتني أهلنا

يا حماة ساميحيننا /// والله حقدك علينا
انت منا وإلينا /// بالجبار أملنا
حاشا الله يخاذلنا

جسر الشغفور ورستن /// لحن الشهادة غن
مهما تقتل وتدفن /// تقتل أمم وتدفن
يا باري إلنا الجنة

شهيدينا لا ما مات /// زغردن له يا البنات
خادمت وحوريات /// خادمت وحوريات
بإذن الله على الجنة

من الرقة للقامشلي /// دم البطولة يغلي
يقتل أمم ويصلي /// يقتل أمم ويصلي
يا خسيس ارحل عنا

حتى أحرار الساحل /// تبصم بأنك راحل
والله نظامك فاشل /// ظالم وأمنك فاشل
يا خسيس ارحل عنا

دوري دوري دوري /// يا نوارس دوري
يا شهيد بلادي /// ياسمين وجوري
وادعوا يا أهلنا /// والشهادة حملنا

