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

## **Generational Dynamics: Eritrean Women in Egypt**

A Thesis Submitted to  
The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

by Naseem Hashim

Under the supervision of  
Dr. Martina Rieker

December/2012

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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy  
Center for Migration and Refugee Studies  
Generational Dynamics: Eritrean Women in Egypt

Naseem Hashim

Supervised By Dr. Martina Rieker

### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the experience of Eritrean women in Egypt across different generations. The purpose of the study is to explore the connection between class, choice and rights in shaping the experiences of three different generations of Eritrean women living in Egypt. This research investigates the experiences of three different groups from Eritrean women in Egypt. The first group is the first generation of Eritrean women who were displaced more than thirty years ago as result of the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1961. The second group is the second generation of Eritrean women who grew up and lived for more than two decades in Egypt. The third group is the new wave of Eritrean women who came to Egypt after the second war between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1998.

One of the main findings of this thesis is that the social exclusion of the first generation did not negatively affect the process of integration into Egyptian society of the second generation. Secondly, the transnational lives that the first generation lived lead the second generation's rejection of their parents' transnational marriages. One of the main reasons for the first generation of Eritrean women to choose to come to Egypt was education opportunities for their children. The subsequent new waves of Eritrean women

who came to Egypt after the second war in Eritrea in 1998 in contrast were driven predominantly by the search for migration opportunities. Some of the new waves of Eritrean women had already acquired Sudanese nationality prior to moving to Egypt, upon arrival they applied for refugee status. In contrast, the second generation of Eritrean women's the lack of citizenship rights influences their decision to migrate. In general, all three generations are trying to find migration opportunities after the revolution in Egypt.

### **Keywords**

Eritrean Women; Social Exclusion; Integration Process; Class; revolution; and transnationalism.

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## **Introduction:**

Exiled Eritrean women in Egypt played an important role in reconstructing their families' lives in a new society. Having been displaced by a three-decade war of national liberation in Eritrea, they enjoyed few rights and limited access to facilities and resources in their new setting. Yet, in the face of these notable challenges and difficult life circumstances, they succeeded in prioritizing the education of their children so as to create better life opportunities for them. Unlike the mothers of the first generation, their children as well as the new wave of Eritrean women who came to Egypt after 2000, while facing a similar range of challenges as the first generation, put migration to Europe and North America as the primary means to better life opportunities for themselves and their families. This thesis presents a small group of people who do not fit any of the categories in the field of migration likewise they differ from the stereotypical refugee. The thesis investigates generational dynamics among Eritrean women through the exploration of relations between class, displacement and socioeconomic background. This study challenges perceptions of the lack of choice of migration for migrants and refugees.

I will give brief introduction to the three different categories of women discussed in this study. The first generation of Eritrean women refers to those who were displaced thirty years ago as result of the first war that started between Eritrea and Ethiopia in 1961 and lasted until 1991. They settled in Egypt after moving through one or more countries. The second generation refers to the daughters of the first generation who grew up and lived for more than two decades in Egypt. Some of these women are still living in Egypt, while others have moved to third countries. The new wave of Eritrean women refers to Eritrean women who came to Egypt after the second war between Eritrea and Ethiopia that started in 1998 and lasted until 2000. These women either came from Eritrea because of the war or were already living in other countries such as Sudan or Saudi Arabia.

For decades, scholarship on the dynamics of migrations has examined the protracted social and economic situation of refugees and long term residents, with a growing body of literature that focuses on the situation of refugee women in particular (Al Sharmani 2003; Grabska 2005, 2006; Ajygin 2009). The role of Eritrean women in

Egypt has, however, been understudied because they are small group and do not fit under one category in the field of migration. The aim of this thesis is to examine the life histories of displaced Eritrean women who have lived in Egypt with their children over a period of almost three decades. It is a class based analysis which focuses on upper and middle class Eritreans from different generations. One of the main challenges facing both the first generation and the new wave of Eritrean women in Egypt is social exclusion. Both of them experienced social exclusion differently. Socioeconomic disadvantages and decreasing financial resources have seriously affected their life options, and constrained their choices and decisions. Furthermore, the first generation had by default socially excluded themselves from the host community and limited their interaction with them. One of the reasons for this was the high degree of interdependence within their communities of origin. The socioeconomic background of the predominantly middle and upper middle-class Eritrean families of the first generation also played a role in shaping their ideas, experiences, interactions, and everyday life activities. The new wave of Eritrean women, by contrast, lacked the social and cultural capital of the first generation after they came to Egypt, thus they experienced refugeeness in Egypt. They have faced social exclusion and have been marginalized by the host community. Their socioeconomic background as middle class and their lived experience in Egypt has shaped their larger priorities, which has been focused on migration to the Europe and North America.

Eritrean women from the first generation were forced to leave their country because of the war and the social transformation that Eritrea was going through; however, they choose to leave their first country of asylum to be settled in Egypt to educate their children. Many issues came up in this study, among which the issues of class, choice and rights are the main themes outlined throughout the study. The element of class – their upper and middle class status - played a role in shaping their choice. They wanted to open a field of possibilities for their children and they chose to live transnational lives, while their spouses were left behind in their first country of asylum and sent remittances to their spouses.

Similar to the first generation, the new wave of Eritrean women chose to come to Egypt in order to migrate to a third country for better life opportunities for their children. Also the element of class played a role in shaping their choice. Being middle class enabled these women to make a choice to leave their Sudanese citizenship and their stable lives in Sudan and apply for refugee status in Egypt. However, their socioeconomic statuses depend on their spouses and their ability to negotiate their transnational space and space in the host country. The lack of migration opportunities and the long bureaucratic procedures and hurdles through UNHCR made them experience refugeeness. In general, Egypt is considered as transit country for the new wave but it is the destination country for the first generation.

The experience of the first generation of Eritrean women did not impact negatively on the second generation, either in terms of their interaction with the host community or their ability to benefit from whatever facilities were available to them. For the most part born or mostly raised within Egypt, they do not perceive themselves as socially excluded and have been able to cope and integrate socially with the new society and to create a new identity. “We were never told that we will return home, we came to stay”, says a thirty years old woman from the second generation. The second generation enjoyed social rights in Egypt and did not face any problems in interacting with the host community. Enjoying social rights in Egypt enhanced their sense of belonging and influenced their perceptions as being part of larger community in Egypt. However, one of the main issues that characterized this generation is the lack of citizenship rights, the absence of political rights and insecure legal status, made this generation aware that they were not part of the Egyptian society. In other words, it weakened their membership and participation in core components of Egyptian life. Likewise, perceptions within the Eritrean community of the male as breadwinner meant that migration opportunities were given to men if available.

One of the findings of this study is after the January 25th, 2011 Egyptian revolution all of the three segments of Eritrean women are trying to find migration opportunities for various reasons. In general, the security situation and the limited rights that the long term residences can practice in Egypt increased their desire to find safe

places to move to. The second generation after they finished their education in Egypt they are unable to secure residency through educational visa. Furthermore, for the first and second generations, finding migration opportunities is primarily in order to acquire acceptable travel documents in order to have freedom of movement to visit their children and/ or to join their spouses living in another country. Moreover, after the revolution it is important to have legal status in Egypt to avoid the risk of deportation. For the new wave of Eritrean women, the motivation to migrate is to find stability in the West.

### **Aim of the study:**

The central purpose of the study is to investigate the connection between class and displacement, and to explore the ways in which socio-economic factors influence the life of displaced persons. Through the whole study three themes will be examined: rights, choice and class. In general, upper and middle class did not garner attention by many scholars, and Eritreans from upper and middle class in specific did not attract any attention in Egypt. The experiences of exiled Eritrean women in Egypt offer new readings of categories in forced migration studies and in migration studies in general. It is not merely adding the element of gender to the existing migration research, but rather, it aims to reflect on how rights, choice and class present new dynamics to gender relations in forced migration studies.

One of the questions posed by anthropologists regarding the impact of migration concerns the social relation between men and women from the same culture. Moving to a new location is often associated with a change in gender roles, as it provides women a space where gender relations can be renegotiated. In this study the theme of changing gender roles will be examined among the first generation and the new wave of Eritrean women, illustrating the potential for women's 'liberation' through movement to a new location, and the complexity of renegotiations. Migration allowed Eritrean women in Egypt to escape from constraints within the household and increased their decision-making capacity. However, it does not mean that constraints within the household is the reason for them to move to another country, it is rather shows the impact of migration on their lives.

Hugo (1993), in trying to answer the question of why migration occurs, stated that women's migration and temporary forms of migration have increased in developing countries. One of the themes that will be examined in this study is the dynamics of migration decision-making. Fischer et al. (1997) explained that a person's expectation of advantages and disadvantages in the destination country is a driving factor for migration. Seeking opportunities to improve living standards and health and education outcomes, and or to live in safer (UNDP, 2010), more responsive communities are the factors that drive Eritrean women from the new wave to decide to come to Egypt or to move to a third country where they enjoy more rights. The human development report (2009) indicates that people tend to stay within the region of the country of origin. I argue that the desire for better life standards is not the only reason behind the migration decision. Loss of hope in the prospects of development in the country of origin – Eritrea in the context of this study - also pushes individuals to move across the region. Furthermore, my thesis tries to answer the questions: are these women are passive victims as described in the literature? Or, do they perceive themselves as victims? I will argue that these women have the ability to make choices within the limited space of rights they enjoy.

### **Structure of the study:**

**Chapter one** gives a historical overview of Eritrea and background information on the status of Eritrean women in Eritrea, and in Egypt.

**Chapter two** presents the narratives of the Eritrean women from the first generation. Their experience of social exclusion will be examined across different domains: from the construction of their identity, to their survival strategies, the challenges they face, and the process of decision-making. It will pay particular attention to class and the ways in which it shapes the choices and needs of the first generation to educate their children.

**Chapter three** will examine the experience of the second generation, which is shaped by the exclusion of their parents. It examines the process of integration of the second generation by focusing on education attainment. The concept of citizenship will be examined.

**Chapter four** focuses on access to employment for the second generation. It also focuses on the link between citizenship, rights and migration. It discusses marriage opportunities and the rejection of the second generation of the transnational life of their mothers.

**Chapter five** presents the situation of the new wave of Eritrean women who came after the second Ethiopian -Eritrean war. It will tap into issues such as migration decision making, class and desire. The first part pays particular attention to the impact of migration on marital relation for Eritrean women from the new wave. The second part tackles issue such as marriage opportunities in relation to migration opportunities and the elements of choice for single women in choosing their future spouses.

**Chapter six** reflects on the situation of three generations during and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution and highlights the desire for migration for all Eritrean women in the study.

**Ending remarks**

## Chapter One: Background on Eritrea

### Historical overview:

Eritrea was an Italian colony from 1890 until 1941, and then came under the British mandate for a little over a decade before a UN resolution in 1952 federated it with Ethiopia. In 1958, the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) was formed to end Ethiopian rule through civil action that would culminate in a general insurrection. In 1960, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was established in Cairo by students and exiled political figures, and in 1961, on the eve of the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia, the ELF launched an armed liberation struggle that was to last three long and bitter decades. (Kebbede & Holyoke, 1993).<sup>1</sup>

Through the late 1960s, the ELF went through a series of transformations and in 1970 split into two groups. The break-away group eventually became known as the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and adopted a radical Maoist perspective that emphasized the need for social transformations in the process of conducting the armed insurgency (Kebbede & Holyoke, 1993; Campbell, 2005; Cowan, 1983). The EPLF emphasized the need for self-reliance and depended on grassroots support. It organized social programs such as land reform, famine relief and various social services including the provision of education and health care (Campbell, 2005). They were assisted in this by the influx in the mid-1970s of large numbers of relatively well-educated young men and women from the urban areas. The new recruits greatly enhanced the organizational capacity of the two movements, but simultaneously heightened the simmering discord between them. In 1980, they crossed swords with each other, and a year later the ELF was forced out of the Eritrean arena by a combined attack from the EPLF and its allied movement in northern Ethiopia, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Thereafter, the EPLF was the only effective opposition force inside Eritrea (Campbell, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Muslims, who constituted the bulk of the recruits and the leadership, initially founded the ELF. By the mid-1970s, however, many Christians joined the ELF.

In 1974, following the repressive conditions created in Eritrea by the military regime that came to power as a result of the Ethiopian Revolution, the liberation war escalated and reached Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. The deteriorating security situation led to a mass influx of Eritreans into Sudan. And in 1984, famine forced another wave of Eritreans to flee to neighboring countries. By then, it was estimated that one third of the Eritrean population was forced into exile or displaced (Daniel, 2002). In general, there were three main waves of displacement of Eritreans during the thirty year liberation war. The first was in the mid- 70s, with the operations of the Derg<sup>2</sup> regime in Ethiopia 1974. The second wave was after the 'Red Star Campaign', which was the largest attack by Ethiopia during the conflict. The third wave was in the 1980s, as the EPLF placed a series of attacks that led to the victory of Eritrea (Connell, 1997; Koser, 2002).

The liberation war ended in 1991 and in 1993 a UN supervised referendum confirmed Eritrea's national sovereignty (Reid, 2001). Over the three decades of the liberation war, however, and since the resumption of conflict between the two countries in 1998-2000, Eritrea was one of the highest refugees producing countries in the world, generating more than 500,000 refugees in Sudan, and 100,000 to 150,000 refugees and migrants around the world (Bariagaber, 2006). In 1998, another war broke out between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which triggered a new wave of Eritrean refugees to neighboring countries (Daniel, 2002). The second war between the two states was particularly devastating for Eritrea on all fronts: economic, social and political. All these developments were to have a profound impact on the life chances of Eritrean households, a large number of which were now female-headed households, because of the military lifestyle, men either are drafted or fled Eritrea. This represented a very different role for women who themselves came from predominantly traditional families.

### **The Status of Women in Eritrea before the War**

Eritrea is a multiethnic country and is comprised of nine ethno-linguistic groups each having distinct historical experiences. The current population, according to the

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<sup>2</sup> The Derg was a military committee that systematically harassed, imprisoned and persecuted Eritreans.



World Bank, is around 5,253,676 million (WB, 2010). Eritrea is one of the poorest countries in the world and the economic and social infrastructure was destroyed as a result of the protracted wars (Upshon, 2007). Currently, Eritrea's rank in the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) is 177 out of 187 countries (United Nation, 2011).

Women's status before the war was established through semi-feudal socioeconomic systems – agricultural and pastoral – and within two conservative religious - Coptic and Muslim. The structure of the family was hierarchical, patrilineal, and authoritarian (Stefanos, 1997; Upshon, 2007). Women from upper and middle class were confined to the private sphere and many had limited economic or political rights (Stefanos, 1997; Kibreab, 1995). The colonial education system likewise excluded women from the public sphere, and women were relegated to what were considered to be their vocations: that is, home economics, and skills that did not prepare them to be out of their home in public positions. For the upper and middle class Muslims illiteracy among women was consequently very high. However, they were instructed in religious education to a certain age. Marriage was a contract between men in which women essentially had little or no say. Women were not allowed to ask for divorce. Among some of the ethnic communities such as the Tigre, women were permitted to inherit land, livestock and other property but could not claim these rights because their inheritance was managed by the male members of the family. Upper and middle class Eritreans who owned land established relationships with the Italian authorities to manage their lands. That allowed certain Eritrean women to socialize with Italian women and become exposed to modern lifestyles. However, the position of women and their role and rights differed across ethnic, religious, and class divides (Campbell, 2005).

### **Women's Status during the War of Liberation**

When the liberation war started in 1961, Eritreans were fighting against one of the largest armies in Africa, and women were not directly recruited into the movement for a little over a decade. Although the first three women who joined the liberation struggle did so in the ELF, the movement itself did not encourage women to join the armed struggle. Religious leaders were against this idea, and insisted on restricting women's

participation. However, by the mid-1970s, the EPLF was more determined to apply the ideology of social transformation, which partly focused on gender equality. The political ideology of the EPLF, including its policy on gender relations, attracted many women to the nationalist movement (Upshon, 2007). As a result, in mobilizing and recruiting fighters, the EPLF increasingly focused on women. Educating women was considered an important priority in this respect, as was the Front's provisions that granted rural women access to land. The number of women who became actively involved in the EPLF exceeded 30% of the frontline fighters (Hale, 2001; Campbell, 2005). These women played a central role during the war in other fields as well.

It has been argued that one of the main reasons why Eritrean women joined the struggle was to resist their subordinate position in society. They were determined to fight on two fronts simultaneously: anti-colonial struggles and the struggle against women's subordination. (Cowan, 1983; Upshon, 2007). Naturally, there were also women who fled the war zones, escaping for fear of being drafted. The social transformation that occurred during the war was not generally welcomed by the upper and middle classes in Eritrea because it meant a radical redistribution of wealth and political power within Eritrea itself (Cowan, 1983). It was resisted by conservative Muslims and Coptic families who prohibited their daughters from joining the struggle. In exile, these women were to play an important role in the social reproduction of their individual households as well as that of their community. The traditionalist affirmation of female inferiority was challenged by the women who joined the struggle and believed that they had a place in political life and could become influential actors in the transformation of their society (Campbell, 2005). In general, most who left Eritrea during the 70s were those who were escaping the social transformation that was occurring in Eritrea, as well as the violence of war.

### **The Situation of Women in Post-Independence Eritrea**

Ever since 2000, following the end of the 1998-2000 Ethiopian-Eritrean war, there was a rise of an opposition movement against the state and in return the state put more restrictions on civil liberties. The human rights situation in Eritrea deteriorated. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have expressed their deep concern over the

human rights situation in Eritrea, especially in the area of religious and political freedoms as well as the treatment of draft evaders and army deserters (Bariagaber, 2006; Upshon, 2007). The Eritrean government has been accused of violating political freedoms. For example, dissenting Ministers have been arrested or excluded from political life, and large-scale arrests of critics started to appear. No freedom of speech or private press has been allowed, and independent media sources have been closed and their reporters imprisoned. The number of political prisoners has increased dramatically as has the forced conscription of women into the military and rape and sexual abuse. Political dissent and criticisms from Eritreans in the Diaspora have consequently increased.

These circumstances have forced large numbers of young men and women to flee Eritrea, largely in order to escape the indefinite military conscriptions that are the fate of so many young people. The Eritrean government maintains a “shoot to kill” policy in relation to anyone attempting to flee across the border. Human Rights Watch Reports on Eritrea indicate that Eritreans face serious human rights violations. They are subjected to arbitrary detentions, tortures, extrajudicial killings, and severe restrictions on freedom of expressions and worship (Watch, 2010). In 2008, Eritreans filed the second highest number of asylum claims worldwide, despite the fact that Eritrea is one of the smallest countries in the world (Ajygin, 2010). Therefore, the Eritrean refugees who are deported back to Eritrea, as happened with some refugees in Egypt and Libya, are at risk of torture and other ill treatment as punishment for "betraying" the country or fleeing military service. This is the main reason that Eritrean refugees in Sudan often choose to cross to Egypt (Watch, 2010). The above mentioned situation prevents Eritrean families who live in neighboring countries such as Egypt, Sudan and Gulf countries from returning to Eritrea. Furthermore, the situation in Eritrea raises a challenge for Eritrean women in Egypt, as that they have to secure their legal status in Egypt either as foreigners or refugees.

### **Profile of Eritreans in Egypt:**

In order to get a better understanding of why Eritreans choose Egypt as a destination, it is essential to provide an overview of the relations between Egypt and Eritrea. Egypt and Eritrea have relations going back to 1950s, when Egypt was undermining the Haile Selassie's government. Ethiopia was perceived as a threat for the Egyptian security from the South. Therefore, it strengthened its relation with Eritreans opponents. Egypt allowed Eritrean nationalists to carry out political activities such as open political offices, conduct diplomatic relations, and organize political meetings (Shinn, 2006). An Eritrean Students' Union was established as early as 1953, and exiled Eritrean politicians – such as Ibrahim Sultan, the main leader of the Independence Bloc of the 1940s – were given asylum there. Radio broadcasts in Arabic and Tigrina were made possible in part to pressure the Haile Selassie government, which was a strong ally of Israel at the time. It is worth noting that the decision to start an armed liberation movement was made in Cairo by Eritrean nationalists who established the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in July 1960 (Bereketeab, 2007). In 1962 the ELF had complete support and was financially supported by the Arab states (Bariagaber, 2006), in the spirit of solidarity, given that the Eritrean revolution arose at a time when most of the Arab states were newly independent (Shinn, 2006).

### **Characteristics of Eritreans in Egypt:**

The Eritrean community in Egypt is diverse, and their number in Egypt is increasing. According to Cooper (1992), the number of the Eritreans in Egypt started to increase significantly from 1977 onward. The profile of the Eritreans in Egypt until the 1990s was predominantly characterized by individuals from better-educated, urban, middle-class backgrounds. Eritreans residing in Cairo were mainly composed of three groups: 1) university students who were recipients of scholarships from the Egyptian government, 2) female headed families who came to Egypt for the education of their children while the husbands were working in the Gulf countries or on the battlefield in Eritrea (these represent the first and second generations of this study); and 3) diplomats and opponents of the Ethiopian government (Al-Sharmani, 2003).

The estimated number of Eritreans refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt is 1,987 (UNHCR, 2012). However, the exact number of the first wave of Eritreans who lived in Egypt between the late 70s and late 80s is unknown because not all of the Eritrean families were registered with UNHCR. The number of the Eritreans in Egypt has increased significantly due to the cessation clause of the UNHCR and the Eritrean government, which forced Eritrean refugees to flee Sudan for fear of deportation to Eritrea (Samy, 2009). In 2007 – 2008, the number of recognized refugee claims in the UNHCR Cairo was relatively low compared to other RSD systems, as 45% of refugee claims were rejected (Kagan, 2009). The reason behind this is that the UNHCR in most cases did not recognize military desertion as grounds for refugee protection (Ajygin, 2010). The UNHCR received some criticism in RSD producers especially in religious credibility assessments and quality of UNHCR's RSD operations (Kagan, 2009). In recent years Eritreans are perceived to be illegal or economic migrants who, using Egypt as transit country, attempt to cross the border to Israel (Ajygin, 2010). This situation attracted lots of attention at the IOM and UNHCR, which recently started to recognize the situation of Eritrean refugees in Egypt and to understand the dynamics of Eritrean flows into Egypt.

### **Rethinking categories and classifications:**

It is important to address vulnerability of certain groups, but to generalize from micro studies of diversity can lead to false result. Vulnerability and visibility are issues raised in gender and a migration studies. Vulnerability is constructed through the assumption that women who migrate retain their subordinate positions with them. As a result, women were often portrayed as passive victims of displacement (Kibreab, 1995). Labeling female migrants or displaced women as a vulnerable group leads to the multiplication of support systems and the creation of agencies (Morokvasic, 1993). The issue of women vulnerability will be addressed in this study. Eritrean women were not passive victims and did not retain their subordinate position in the process of migration. Visibility, on the other hand, is constructed through the category of vulnerability. It draws attention to the selectivity with which women are made visible as migrants or refugee through class and sexuality. For instance, many scholars draw attention to Sudanese

women who work as domestic workers (Edwards, 2007). This research focuses on the vulnerability of these women that arises from their inability to have legal protection because they are not protected by Egyptian law and are thus subject to exploitation. However, these studies do not highlight the creativity of these women in generating income to survive. Likewise, research on trafficking draws more attention to the vulnerability of women through the process by focusing on the sexuality of the women, ignoring the fact that women make decision to migrate and they take the risk. Therefore, the focus on vulnerability has implications on how resources are allocated to the visibly vulnerable. Also it takes the attention from those who are vulnerable but invisible and do not have agencies to protect them. The stories of Eritrean female headed households in Egypt were ignored because they are from upper and middle class Eritrean families, hence they do not face the same challenges that most of refugee communities face. Eritrean communities face different kind of challenges because they are from different class. For instance, legal status is the most important issue for Sudanese refugee communities in Egypt and it attracts the attention of many researchers. Therefore, the issue of legal status was generalized to other refugee communities in Egypt. While for Eritreans from the first and the second generation to secure legal status in Egypt was not an issue because they could secure educational visas in Egypt.

Many scholars noted that the narrow definition of forced migration and refugees has a negative impact on displaced persons (Malkki, 1992; Zetter, 1998; Mehta and Gupte, 2003; Turton, 2003; Robinson, 2003). Hein (1993) noted that immigration is considered an economic form of migration, while the category of refugee is a political one. Eritreans constitute both. One of the main challenges in this study is how to categorize Eritrean women from different generations and class backgrounds. The literature that is available is mostly on Sudanese communities, as they are considered the largest communities in Egypt. Likewise, research focuses on different categories and classifications of displacement such as refugees, transit migrants, or IDP. These categories hence are not useful when it comes to small groups such as Eritrean women in Egypt. There are no clear demarcations that differentiate forms of mobility, for instance, voluntary, forced, regular, irregular, temporary, and seasonal migration. Also, definitions

of a person can change during the processes of movement. For instance, if a person during conflict stayed within the national border s/he is considered as IDP, and if s/he crosses the national border s/he is an asylum seeker; if s/he is granted asylum then s/he is a refugee, if not, a foreigner (UNDP, 2010). Robinson (2003) explained that voluntary movement may include elements of coercion just as involuntary movement contains rational decision-making or strategic choices. Having the element of choice does not imply that the involuntary movement became voluntary though the label of the person has changed from forced migrant to migrant.

Non-Egyptians are presented in two major categories: refugees and foreigners. Those are the most visible categories present in the literature on non-Egyptian. These two categories do not fit the Eritreans from different generations. The situation of the Eritrean women presents challenges to these categories, whether the labels are refugee, forced migrant, economic migrant, transit migrant and migrant. Eritrean women from the first generation were forced to leave Eritrea and were displaced thirty years ago because of generalized violence in Eritrea that occurred between 1961 and 1991. Therefore, they fall under the refugee category - refugee in its broader meaning as proposed by Grabaska, Al-Sharmani and H. Bond (Grabaska, 2005) because they had a well-founded fear of persecution and they could not return to their country of origin. The asylum system offers protection in the first country of asylum - such as Sudan - for those who are fleeing persecution but not for those who move from one country to another searching for more rights before they settle in Egypt. The focus of this study is Eritreans from upper and middle classes. They have the privilege to choose where to settle because they have financial resources that help them to meet their needs. First and second generations lived in Egypt as foreigners, and even those who had refugee status were treated as foreigners by the host society and by the government. Furthermore, these women did not identify themselves as refugees, and this reflects a common self-identification within the first wave of Eritrean women. The second generation that did not experience their parents' displacement and their long residency in Egypt poses challenges to the concepts of citizenship and integration processes, and it shows the complexity of identifying citizenship in the global arena.

Transit migration is now recognized as one part of international migration. Generally it is defined as a person who stays in one country for some period of time while seeking to migrate permanently to another country; the IOM defines it as “refugee waiting for resettlement” (Düvell, 2006). The new wave of Eritrean women, those who came from neighboring countries, are seeking migration opportunities, and thus, apply for refugee status. Like the first generation, most of these women cannot return to Eritrea due to the political conditions in Eritrea. Their motivation to move from one country to another is to have more rights as a return to Eritrea is not a viable option for them. However, those who have Sudanese nationality can return to Sudan so that situates them between refugees and transit migrants in Egypt. The common elements between the two segments of women from the first generation and the new wave are that they choose to come to Egypt; they cannot return to Eritrea; and they seek more rights. In my study I present two different segments of displaced women: the first one are refugees who in the process of moving were labeled migrants. The second group started as migrants, and in their migratory process were labeled as refugees or transit migrants. Because they can make migration decisions, they are excluded from one category and included into another category. However, the presented categories do not give a better understanding on the situation of these women and misses the dynamics in the migration processes.

In my study I do not place Eritrean women in Egypt in the refugee category. I use the term displaced Eritrean women because these women do not identify themselves as refugees. Also I cannot ignore the fact that they share similarities with other refugees in Egypt but still there are differences that distinguish them from being “the stereotypical” refugees. They are not categorized as refugees which carries the assumption that they have certain needs and they need certain agencies to provide them assistance and protection. Also I cannot label them as migrants/foreigners which carries the assumption that they move from one country to another to have better life conditions, ignoring the fact that they are searching for more rights and they cannot return to their country of origin because of the political conditions. Therefore, they are situated between refugees and migrants (Hashim, 2011).



## **Theoretical framework:**

### International migration theories:

A brief discussion of theories that examine different aspects of migration and adaptive strategies can serve to situate this research in a broader context. Early migration theories suggest that both women and men's activities are complementary and serve to build social cohesion. In applying this idea to the gender dimensions of migration, theories of gender complementarity assert that there are differences in migration behaviors between men and women (Willis & Yeoh, 2000). The movement of men tends to be facilitated by ties established in the public sphere, while that of women is shaped and anchored by their role in the domestic sphere. Such theories ignore important issues such as power relations, social reproduction, and the dynamics of social change in different places and times (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999). Recently, international migration theories started to recognize the fluidity of gender relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 1999), and refer to the link between migration and the changing in status and gender roles as a result of the economic and social responsibilities in the new society (Sadek, 2007).

Women's movement is perceived as 'tied movement', i.e. women's migration is perceived to be linked to their spouses. Also, when women make the decision to migrate the family takes a greater importance in influencing their decisions. However, women's movement is not always tied to their spouses. Research on Eritrean women in Egypt reveals that men are left behind in the first country of asylum while women move to another country and search for migration opportunities. The division of the household in two different countries is an indication of the restructuring of gender relations. Although it provides freedom for women, it may also pose economic disadvantages, especially if remittances are irregular (Willis & Yeoh, 2000).

In the case of Eritrean women in Egypt from the first generation and new wave, being in the process of migration or being in Egypt constitutes an empowering aspect in terms of gender relation. However, these women experience vulnerability differently, as they are still dependent on their spouses or other family members who interfere in their

freedom to make decisions. They have to renegotiate their space in the host country and in transnational spaces as well.

Class theories:

Growing attention is drawn to characteristics of migration that affect gendered migration such as region, destination and type of migration; and gender intersects with class, ethnicity, sexuality and age and other social variables (Willis & Yeoh, 2000). Forced migration raises questions of identity, space and place. In early research class was not part of forced migration analysis. Kunz (1973) identified two kinetic models of refugee movements; anticipatory refugee movement and acute refugee movement. An anticipatory refugee refers to the movement of a refugee who departs his country prepared. He knows his destination, he flees before the decline of the military or political situation in the country, and he has some financial resources. An acute refugee is a refugee who is compelled to cross the border in search of safety after the decline of the political or military situation and without the desire to remain in another country (Kunz, 1973). Many scholars have shown that there is a hierarchy of destinations that can be reached depending on the resources that refugees can mobilize (Willis & Yeoh, 2000; Hear, 2004). Class and socioeconomic background are important in influencing decision making in routes taken, means of migration and destination countries (Hear, 2004). Furthermore, when the decision to migrate is made certain aspects need be examined such as economic and political structures. Hear (2004) emphasizes the role that class plays in patterns of migration. He explains that restriction posed on international migration and the ability to reach a destination country depends on three elements: cost, connections and chances. The first two elements are determined by socioeconomic standing. Hear argues that better resourced migrants have the access to the desirable destination. In this thesis I argue that class and socioeconomic background determined by resources that a person can draw on in exile are important not only in shaping their migration pattern but also migrants' needs and displacement experiences in the destination country.

The first generation of Eritrean women who were displaced in Egypt provides a clear example of how class and socioeconomic background affected the desire to migrate

and their experiences in Egypt. They were able to move from different countries to stay in Egypt and they depended on their own resources which in turn influences the individual's needs and priorities such as educating their children. Furthermore, it gives a better understanding as to the reasons that hinder the social interaction between Eritrean women and the Egyptian host community. Because they lost their previous status as upper class Eritrean women they chose to limit their interaction with the host community. This study looks at how the background of Eritrean women from the first generation affected their life in Egypt, how it shaped their self- constructions, and influenced their needs. It also traces the ways in which these women have been able to depend on different economic, cultural, and social capital in securing these needs, especially educational opportunities for their children.

#### Social exclusion:

Social exclusion first was presented as different categories of persons who lacked the protection of social insurance and were labeled a social problem. Later on, it referred to social disintegration, in term of the relation between individual and society (Silver, 1995; Rodgers, Gore & Figueiredo, 1995). Some research has linked social exclusion and increasing of unemployment, and all forms of international migration. Hence there are multiple meanings expressed by the notion of social exclusion. It can be defined by examining the relation between social integration, poverty, marginalization, and the enjoyment of rights in the host society. Also social exclusion can be viewed through three components: inequality, entitlement, deprivation and marginalization, but not necessary poverty. However, it is better examined in the context of and in relationships between rights, livelihood and well- being (Silver, 1995; Rodgers, Gore & Figueiredo, 1995).

Hassan (2006) defines social exclusion as:

“Broadly describe [ing] both the structures and the dynamic processes of inequality among groups in society that, over time, structure access to critical resources that determine the quality of membership in society and ultimately produce and reproduce a complex of unequal outcomes”

Social exclusion, therefore, refers to the inability of a certain group to participate fully in the host society due to structural inequalities in accessing social, economic, political and cultural resources (Galabuzi, 2006). Marginality and social exclusion have traditionally been equated with poverty theories. Recently it has been used in analysis of social disintegration, in term of the relationship between the individual and society, as a result of the increasing long-term unemployment of the unskilled workers and immigrants (Rodgers, Gore, & Figueiredo, 1995). One of the main questions that emerges is “exclusion from what?.” In the context of this research I will rely on Silver’s (1995) characterization of social exclusion referring to exclusion from livelihood; secure and permanent employment, housing, education , health services; skills, cultural capital, sociability, respect, fulfillment and understanding This, in turn, raises an important question: what rights does a displaced person have while living in country for long period of time? What are exclusionary policies that shape a person’s life?

Social exclusion in the context of migration and refugee studies has not been studied in depth. However, growing attention is being paid to issues related to social exclusion such as poverty, inequality, entitlements, marginalization or deprivation (Rodgers, Gore, & Figueiredo, 1995). Therefore, it can be viewed through the marginalization and the degree of the integration process.

### **Social exclusion in the context of Egypt:**

In Egypt, social exclusion can be seen through the processes of marginalization and integration, as previously mentioned. Marginalization is considered as a three way dynamic: 1) being marginalized legally in terms of access to rights and services by the host government 2) being discriminated against by the host society; and 3) excluding oneself from the host society (Grabska K., 2006).

Class and socioeconomic background and social exclusion theories give a better understanding of displacement experience of two segments of Eritrean women in Egypt. Some Eritrean women have refugee status and others had to secure their residency through education visas. The first generation of Eritrean women in Egypt are labeled as foreigners, even those who have refugee status. The government’s policies treat them as temporary migrants though they have lived in Egypt for decades. They have been denied access to certain rights such as health services and education for their children, which

added more financial burden onto them. As mentioned before most of the subjects of this study are from the upper – middle class. They depend on remittances from different family members, mainly their spouses, to secure their livelihood for themselves and their children. Similarly to other communities in Egypt such as the Sudanese, there is little difference between those who have refugee status and those that are treated as foreigners. All generations of Eritrean women have been able to negotiate their everyday life straddling both membership in transnational families and membership in small ethnic communities within Egypt.

It is reasonable to argue that within any displaced community, individuals are not equal in terms of their social relationships and their identification with their host community. The degree of marginality in the host community can be linked to their past (Kunz, 1981). This research shows that the first generation was not discriminated against by the host government; because they were considered foreigners and had access to services as long as they could afford them. Also they were tolerated by the Egyptian community; they were treated as guests not as a threat to the livelihoods of Egyptians. However, the loss of previous social status, identity and self worth had an impact on their interaction with the host community (O'Neill & Spybey, 2003). Eritrean women from the first generation choose to exclude themselves from the host society.

Egypt as an urban setting poses major challenges for survival, but at the same time provides ways of hiding illegality and social insecurity (Grabska K., 2006). The new wave of Eritrean women in Egypt is labeled as refugees, asylum seeker or transit migrants. They face social exclusion in term of being marginalized legally because they are in the process of becoming refugees. Many scholars note that the term refugee should not be viewed alone in the context of the country of origin experiences without including refugee experience in the country of asylum, as part of transformation in relationships, networks and experiences, which discloses the dynamic aspect of refugeeness. Furthermore, livelihoods of new wave of Eritreans are characterized by the experience of forced migration regardless of this state of refugeeness in Egypt (Al Sharmani, 2003; Malkki, 1995; Grabska, 2006). Part of the refugee experience is marginalization and discriminated by the host society. The increasing rate of unemployment within the host

society and its struggling economy made the Egyptian community, especially those who live in poor areas, intolerant of refugees who are perceived to be outsiders competing for their jobs. Furthermore, shifting anti-refugee public discourses increases the marginality of non- Egyptian residents and presents them as a burden to society (Al- Sharmani & Grabska, 2009; Choucri, 2010).

Therefore, the new wave of Eritrean women in Egypt is excluded by the host society which in turn leads them to exclude themselves as well. They face the same daily struggles as any other refugee community in Egypt. They are able to sustain their livelihood by depending on remittances. They have access to many services as long as they can afford them. Given that their living conditions in Egypt are related to those who send them remittances, and transnational household disputes renders them particularly vulnerable.

### **Process of integration:**

There are different understandings of the concept of integration. Integration can be viewed as end result or as process itself. In defining integration in the field of forced migration, there are certain aspects that should be taken into consideration, such as policies that governments sets to achieve integration; the status of the concerned persons of foreign origin who have long- term legal residence and the sets of rights a person can enjoy to measure the integration process in certain country (UNHCR, 2009).

Integration is one of the durable solutions suggested by UNHCR for the refugee problem (Grabska K., 2005). The UNHCR defines integration in the context of refugees as a:

Local integration is a dynamic and multifaceted two- way process, which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of the host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and to meet the need of diverse population (UNHCR, 2009)

Kuhlman (1990) has defined the process of integration as ‘The process by which the refugee is assimilated into the social and economic life of a new national community’. Crisp (2004) describes it as the fulfillment of three main components: legal, economic, social and cultural.

Al-Sharmani and Grabska (2003, 2004, 2009) both noted that multiculturalism and ethnic plurality do not exist in the Egyptian context; citizenship is also acquired on the basis of descent. Both permanent migrants and long term refugees - such as the second generation of Eritrean women - are thus not entitled to citizenship. The concept of full local integration is hence absent. It is important to note that refugees are treated as foreigners. Refugees are viewed as a temporary problem people waiting to move to another country, while foreigners are subject to the change of laws and policies that can lead to their loss of legal residency in Egypt at anytime. Their status also depends on the relation between the country of origin of the foreigners and the Egyptian government. Egypt has always a clear official position towards persons from other origins on its territories: Egypt is a transit country where refugees are waiting for their resettlement opportunity (Choucri, 2010). Kagan (2006) notes that this position was guaranteed through the agreement with the UNHCR in 1954, which eliminated the permanent hosting of refugees in Egypt (Choucri, 2010). Therefore the situation of foreigners in Egypt is similar to the refugee situation; they are guests and waiting to move from Egypt.

It is important to examine livelihoods in relation with the degree of integration, especially when full integration has a little chance of happening in a country like Egypt. For instance, Harrel-Bond explains it as a situation of co-existence and sharing the same resources with the host society (quoted in Grabska K., 2005). Al- Sharmani (2003) has defined the concept of integration by linking it to livelihoods in the host community in order to examine the degree of “acceptance, participation, and change” through examining the daily strategies that are used by Somali refugees in Cairo. Grabska has connected the process of integration with the length of stay, and the struggle of refugees to secure their livelihoods as illegal ‘aliens’ within the socioeconomic and policy context of contemporary Egypt. In my research, to give better understanding on the process of integration of the second generation of Eritrean women, I will borrow the definition of

integration that is used by Al- Sharmani (2003), Grabska (2005), and Harrel- Bond (quoted in Grabska K., 2005) in which they link livelihood to the integration process or the situation of co- existence between the host society and Eritreans from the second generation (also see Hashim, 2010). I will add to the above definition the element of educational attainment to evaluate the success of the process of integration. Through the multigenerational process that begins with the first generation of Eritrean women and continues with the second generation – the daughters - I argue that the two way dimension of exclusion – being excluded by the host society and excluding themselves as well - of the first generation did not impact negatively on the process of integration of the second generation.

The integration of the second generation of Eritreans is stands out in relationship to both their mothers and the new wave. Having grown up in Egypt, attended Egyptian schools, interacting with the host community, entering the labour market made them feel a part of the Egyptian community. However, their desire for full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimension of Egyptian life (Hassan, 2006), and knowing that they will not achieve that in Egypt, makes them question their existence in Egypt.

One of the main questions my research tries to answer is how the first generation’s experience with displacement and social exclusion affects the process of integration of their children.

### **Literature review:**

#### **Class:**

Studies on gender and migration have tackled issues that varied among new gender roles and power dynamics, decision making, and transnationalism. Hyndman (2000) has pointed out that the experience of migration differs according to the resources the person has. Those who have resources can take advantage of time and space while others experience migration differently. In “I went as far as my money would take me: conflict, forced migration and class,” Van Hear (2005) sheds light on the hierarchy of destination that can be reached by migrants and asylum seeker depending on the



resources they can draw on. For instance, Iraqi refugees in Egypt have urban and middle class background, and are considered well-educated and highly qualified professionals. They were perceived by the host community as well-off persons. Sadek et al (2011) noted that the needs of the Iraqis in Egypt differ from Sudanese refugees and the majority of the refugee communities. While it is important for the Sudanese refugees to secure income for rent, the Iraqi refugees express greater importance in educating their children (Hashim, 2010). They chose to come to Egypt to educate their children. There is a gap in literature in addressing the intersections between class, migration and gender. Few studies focus on upper and middle class forced migrants. I argue that there is hierarchy in the process of migration that is influenced by the need of women migrants and it is also influenced by the sets of services/rights they can afford in the destination or transit country such as Egypt.

Penz explains the broader implications for coercion and choice: the relation among constraint, threat and the desire to remain (quoted in Marfleet, 2008). Castle (2004) emphasizes the need to focus on the social dynamics of the migratory process, which sheds light on the role of family and community, social network, social and cultural capital in shaping migration. Furthermore, he explains that the link between forced migration and underdevelopment is social transformation. He argues that groups who are labeled as diasporas, refugees and exiles are considered part of transnational communities. However, their characteristics under condition of globalization have changed. The literature reveals that women's mobility is complex and family is one of the areas in which migratory decisions are made. Furthermore, these literature highlights gender roles and power dynamics in new locations. This thesis builds on Castle's (2004) work regarding the social transformation that occurs in forced migration and ways in which it is shaped by globalization and the resulting analytic difficulties in classifying and studying women's mobility. This study of the Eritrean diasporas and its female-headed households in Cairo hopes to contribute to a better understanding of these complex processes and transformations. For example, the new wave of Eritrean women made the decision to migrate, leaving their husbands behind, due to the lack of adequate rights in the first country of arrival. Many Eritreans moved from Saudi Arabia because

they did not have legal residency, which meant lack of access to education for their children. Likewise, the inadequate sets of rights and the political instability in Sudan forced many families to move to Egypt. The narrative of the Eritrean women answers one of the important questions that are understudied by migration scholars: women's understanding of "their rights" and how they can claim them in the light of their migratory process.

### **Transnationalism:**

There is a range of research in the area of transnationalism. Transnationalism is defined by Basch (1994) as social networking created by individuals who live their lives by participating in more than one national community (quoted in Al-Sharmani, 2004). This definition focuses on the ties with the homeland and the idea that settling in a new country does not imply the definitive departure from the country of origin in the mind of the migrants themselves. Cohen (1997) differentiates between cultural heritage, collective memory of the homeland, and bondages among its members. Other scholars like Clifford (1994) and Dhaliwal (1994) consider transnational networking as a source of questioning nations and borders (Al-Sharmani, 2004). Both Tólólyan (1991) and Schnapper (1999) explain that transnational movement refers to people's mobility regardless of their motivation and categories- including immigrants, expatriates, refugees, guest workers, and exiles - and who maintain constant ties (Al-Sharmani, 2004). Al-Ali (2002) stressed that the role of receiving and sending countries in shaping the limitations and possibilities for emergence of transnational social fields. Koser (2002) argues that literature on transnational communities challenges traditional models of citizenship. He notes that after the independence of Eritrea, Eritrean refugees transformed from refugees into a transnational community. And as such are reproduce Eritrean notions of kinship and social obligations. He identifies three parts of this transition: The decision not to return to Eritrea; security of their status in the host countries; and maintaining ties with Eritrean communities and with the state to create a 'transnational identity'.

Alicea (1997) argues that that there is an absence of gendered analysis in literature of transnationalism. Although transnational families are the basis of

transnational activities women as caretakers of the families and their roles in creating the transnational networks are ignored. Al- Sharmani (2004) in her research on Somali families in Egypt has focused on the role of women; and she goes further, redefining transnationalism in the context of forced migration by describing transnational activities in a groups of people who share a past history and common culture. Their identity is shaped by their living conditions and statuses in the host societies, as it shaped by their shared past. Furthermore, transnational networking and ties are essential for the financial sustenance and for the social and cultural survival of the families and communities (Al-Sharmani, 2004).

This thesis argues that Egypt's policies toward refugees/foreigners helps in creating a transnational space and enhance the transnational communities. I argue that transnational life is an integral part of Eritrean communities and is essential to their survival. Being a part of transnational communities is significant in constructing the life of the Eritrean women from different generations. Not only is it essential to their survival but also to their identity and their ties not only to the homeland but further to the extended family that lives in more than one nation, being socially part of this community, and practicing their culture. However, there is a change in the second generation of Eritrean women's prospects in Egypt. The experiences of their mothers of being part of transnational communities and activities shaped their choices and their future prospect of the 'transnational identity'. They reject living transnational lives especially when they choose their future spouses. They make a pre-condition that they be with their spouses in the same country/ place.

K. Koser (2002) posed the question whether the transformation from transnationals to refugees will occur in the Eritrean communities in term of their links with the state. I argue that the condition of the new wave of Eritrean women in Egypt who came after the second war in 1998, illustrates this transformation. The transformation that happens with the new wave of Eritrean women is that they seek migration opportunities so they become part of the transnational system and are very active in this system because it is essential to their survival. Furthermore the link with the Eritrean government diminishes as they become refugees, which means is that they

become active in the transnational systems where they negotiate their transnational space and they become refugees in the sense of being part of the refugee experience in Egypt.

## **Methodology:**

### Interviews and participants:

Interviews were conducted in Tegra (Tigre) or in Arabic, which are the two main languages of the researcher. My long-term relationship with Eritreans in Egypt as a member of the second generation, created an open and confident atmosphere that facilitated access to interviewees. Interviews were conducted at the homes of participants, which allowed for a familiar setting for the interviewees.

Preliminary focus group discussions were conducted to determine the important issues for the Eritrean women in the research. Participants were selected for in-depth interviews to get a better understanding of their experience in Egypt. Field work comprised of the following: (1) structured and semi-structured interviews with Eritrean women who have resided in Egypt for more than two decades; (2) structured and semi-structured interviews with second generation Eritreans who grew up in Egypt; (3) structured and semi-structured interviews with the new wave of Eritrean refugee women in Egypt; (4) three focus group discussions. The first was with six women from the first generation; the second was with four women from the second generation; the third focus group was with the three women and one girl from the new wave of Eritreans in Egypt and two from the second generation. In all the interviews there was dialogue between the mothers and the daughters, which gave me the chance to observe generational dynamics. A different set of questions were posed to each group of the interviewees (See Appendix 1, 2 and 3). The aim of the study is not to compare experience across generations rather to present their experience as it is lived. Furthermore this thesis intends to understand more fully changes within the Eritrean communities across generations.

In researching vulnerable groups such as displaced women, the researcher has to build some level of trust, especially when the participants have never been interviewed, suspicion and lack of interest may arise. The researcher did not have the attitude of

detachment toward the studied community, which some studies consider to be important in the process of observation (Norman & Yvonna S., 2003). However, being part of the Eritrean community and being one of the second generation in Egypt, and sharing the same language, cultural and gender allowed more openness from the participants. Sharing life experiences and the same support systems and facilities within the Eritrean communities gave me insights as to the relevant questions, what information could be found and what possible challenges women might have faced in Egypt. Furthermore, studying at the Center of Migration and Refugee Studies where I work with refugees including Sudanese, Iraqi and Eritrean allowed me to have the academic background and the practice in the field and gave me a better understanding in the legal and socioeconomic situation of different refugee communities.

Anonymity was adopted in the process of writing the thesis. The interviews were not taped and only notes were taken. Prior to the start of the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews, participants received a short explanation of the motives for my research, my affiliation, how I intended to store the data.

### **Ethical considerations:**

Trust and mistrust issues often arise with groups who lost their trust in their governments, other groups in their countries or in the aid system. Building trust helps the displaced persons to open up and share their stories and it is be useful for the research. Therefore, oral consent was used rather than written consent. The narrative method gives forced migrants voice and at the same time they give themselves voices by narrating their stories. Interviewees are involved in the research by selecting what to say and what to focus on and what to leave behind. Interviewees tell their stories as how they lived it and how they experienced their lives which affect the analysis of the research. Also the aim of the research affects how the story is being told to the interviewer and the researcher affects how the participant tells her story. As Riessman (1993), argues concerning narrative analysis,

All forms of representation of experience are limited portraits. Simply stated, we are interpreting and creating texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand

for or take the place of the primary experience, to which we have no direct access. Meaning is ambiguous because it arises out of a process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener, and recorder, analyst, and reader. Although the goal may be to tell the whole truth, our narratives about others' narratives are our worldly creations

This thesis is not intended to be representative, but indicates the important issues for Eritrean women in Egypt. The narratives of these women do not imply that their stories represent all the Eritrean women in Egypt or the Eritrean women in general. It only raises some of the issues that Eritrean women experience with displacement. The effect of the war on Eritrean women is diverse.

### **Demographic data of the participants:**

The sample frame consists of four Eritrean women from the first generation and their daughters who grew up in Egypt:

- 1) Stoum: came in Egypt in 1980 with six children, having attended secondary school in Eritrea ; her elder daughter Halima was interviewed
- 2) Zainab came in 1979 with four children, having attended primary school in Eritrea, her elder daughter Amna was interviewed
- 3) Fatma came in 1982 with seven children, has attended Qur'nic school in Eritrea - her daughter Soad was interviewed
- 4) Aisha came in 1980, she has a university degree from Egypt and she has one daughter, Nagat, who was interviewed

Another two women, Khadija, Nadia, Lamia, and Mariam from the second generation were interviewed; I was able to Skype interview with Fatma's daughter who lives in Australia. She grew up in Eritrea and gave me some insights into her mother's experience in Egypt. I also made use of two older women's background information on women's position before and during the war. Also I had the opportunity to meet two Eritrean women from the second generation who grew up in Egypt and now live in USA. From

the new wave I interviewed Alia, who came from Eritrea in 2004 to avoid military service.

All my interviewees from the first generation are single parents and lived for years without their spouses. They depend on remittances coming from different family members who live abroad. All of them stated that remittances are not sustainable and sending money depends on the financial status of the person who remits the money.

## Chapter two: The Displacement of the First Generation and Life reconstruction

### Introduction:

“Why did we live in exile? What will we say?... we lived in exile to educate our children”

Zainab

In general, most of the displaced persons are under the influences of memories of home; however, they do not remain prisoners of their past. They often draw new maps of desires and of attachments (Malkki, 1992). One of the common desires among displaced Eritreans women from the first generation in Egypt is educational opportunity for their children. The displacement of the first generation of Eritrean women occurred due to the many changes taking place in Eritrea outlined in chapter one. Between anti-colonial struggle, national and militant social justice movements, upper class Eritrean families were acutely aware of the role of modern education in the formation of the new elites in the post-colonial state. Hence, the prioritization of education in exile among the first generation. This chapter presents the narrative of the first generation of exiled Eritrean women. Using “open coding” methods in the narratives I collected themes and sub themes, which are then identified in this chapter. The three main themes are: 1) reason for coming to Egypt; 2) living conditions in Egypt; and 3) prospects of return. Rights, choice and class are sub themes that will be examined. These themes directly reflect the research questions. The chapter focuses on their displacement process starting from their life before fleeing homeland, the decision making process of leaving, then moving from one country to another before setting in Egypt. This information is relevant to my argument that the first generation of Eritrean women was not totally excluded from the host society – Egypt- but rather chose to exclude themselves. The socio-economic background of predominantly middle and upper middle-class Eritrean families played a role in shaping their ideas, experiences, interactions, and everyday life activities. Despite the fact that they were displaced by war, they were able to make decisions to move from their first country of asylum to Egypt in order to meet their needs. They succeeded in prioritizing the education of their children so as to create better life opportunities for them. The notion of rights for the first generation was not important in Egypt; they did



not assume that they had any rights because they were foreigners. Also the manner in which they were treated by the host community made them more dependent on their own community as a replacement for the host society. This became the anchor that supports them in Egypt.

The analysis that follows presents the narratives of four Eritrean women, and their four daughters as well as other participants from the second generation. One of the main challenges came up is that the participants had never been interviewed before. Mentioning the importance of their stories made them willing to share them. They did not think that they had something important to share and they wondered how they could benefit my study. Another challenge faced were questions related to relations with their male family members, and their financial conditions. Unlike the mothers, the daughters of these women were more open to answering these sensitive questions and gave me insight into the challenges that their mothers faced in Egypt. They provided me with information related to male family members, their financial condition, and how they dealt with difficulties.

### **Can the elite respond to the changing conditions?**

Loss of homeland is part of the displacement process. Another part is the transformation in identity and cultural tradition, as Malkki (1995) describes it. However, usually displacement occurs when ones home is becoming “strange and frightening” because of war and social transformation, as happened in Eritrean (ibid). The common narrative between the interviewees is the life they lived in Eritrea and their conditions in Egypt. Most of my interviewees are upper and middle class. Their parents and husbands owned lands, houses and properties in Eritrea. Some of my interviewees mentioned that their families had political power in the region they lived in; other mentioned that they have close family members who were politically active during the war.

Italian colonialism between 1888 and 1941 left significant marks on the Eritrean society through the interaction between the Italians and different ethnic groups. The colonial policies can be understood through customary law, land tenure system, education and health. The core of colonialism can be viewed in segregation practices, which

produced maps of power relations along ethnic and religious groups. For instance, it enabled the Tigre tribe and Muslim communities to increase their wealth and enjoy a degree of social and religious freedom that created the local elites (Dirar, 2007).

During the 1960s and the 1970s two major events happened in Eritrea. First, the war that started on 1961 between Eritrea and Ethiopia; second the social transformation that occurred with the Eritrean fighters which called for the elimination of all social classes across Eritrea and gender equality. Access to land in Eritrea is an important issue as it means social and economic security; also it means power and privilege. It was one of the elements for social transformation in Eritrea that was carried out by the EPLF (Keller, 1981). When Eritrea was under the federation with Ethiopia in 1952, the type of land holding that was established by the Italian colony did not change until 1974. During the Derg regime in Ethiopia in 1974 there was resistance in the western areas of Eritrea. The resistance was strong enough to prevent changes in land tenure system. However, later on, the changes in the land tenure system occurred with the two principal revolutionary groups in Eritrea, ELF and EPLF (Joireman, 1996). Both events were behind the flight of the upper and middle class of Eritrean families. Revolutionary ideologies challenged the upper class Eritrean communities. But this does not imply that the war did not include any of upper and middle class Eritreans, some of upper and middle class Eritrean women were part of the revolution in Eritrea and they were against the interest of their families.

During the Italian colonial period customary law was applied in Eritrean communities<sup>3</sup> in cases of dispute between Italian nationals and Eritreans. Landholding Eritreans established relations with the Italian authority to manage their matters under the Italian rule. The position of upper class women as belonging to the private sphere did not change under the Italian colonial regime and after Eritrea was annexed to Ethiopia in 1961, their primary roles being that of mother, wives and sisters.

Three of the interviewees describing their life in Eritrea reminisced that their work took place in the private and domestic sphere. Literature that tackles the role of Eritrean women before the war usually notes that their work was undervalued by both the male

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<sup>3</sup> Customary law was applied in land, marriage, inheritance and other local matters

members of the family and by colonial authorities. However, these women did not share these views. One of the interviewees, Fatma had a Qur'nic education and Zainab went to school in Massawa, both of them left at an early ages. Stoum went to school in Karen. She did not complete her education because she got married. Fatma, in her early 60s has seven children and has been living in Egypt since 1982. She grew up in Massawa, and mentioned that, “Women, before the war were honored by being at their homes, our men bring us what we need, we had stable life among our family”. That was part of their tradition. She describes that she lived with her extended family in one area where all women socialized together and girls were prepared to take on the responsibility of being wives and mothers. On the other hand, Zainab, in her mid fifties, a mother for four who grew up between Massawa and Asmara, stated that “yes we had a life that separated us from men but we had an active life in Asmara, we used to learn handicraft, cooking and other skills from the wives of Italian diplomats. We were free to move within what is acceptable in our society at that time”. She meant that they socialized with foreign women who provided some services and they learned new skills.

The interaction between settler and Eritrean women did not receive much attention from scholars. Nonetheless, women from upper and middle classes used to interact with Italian women who taught them some aspects of modern life. Asmara and Massawa are the two areas where most of the Italian settlers lived, because Massawa is one of the important ports in Eritrea and Asmara is the capital. However, the narratives imply that Massawa was more conservative regarding women's activities than Asmara. Furthermore, it indicates that women had an active social life in the private sphere.

Stoum, a mother of six who lived in Egypt since 1980, explained that “women according to shari'a have rights to inherit but men in the family are responsible of whatever the woman inherit. According to tradition, women were not allowed to demand their rights because their male family members give them what they want without demanding”. Women have rights but they did not practice their rights. The reason for that is men know their duty and responsibilities toward women in the family and their needs. She added that, “it is a shame to demand your rights”. By this statement Stoum highlighted an important point, which is the notion of rights and practicing these rights.

Many scholars noted that women in general in Eritrea were not allowed to own land, livestock and other property, and that was an indication to their economic subordination to their men (Cowan, 1983). These women know that they have rights according to Shari'a to inherit from their parents, but because it was not common within their social class for woman to manage her financial affairs. Therefore, they did not practice these rights. It was considered as part of men's role to manage the financial affairs of the women.

The role of these women was limited to the private sphere; they did not enjoy or practice their rights in terms of education and financial independence from their male partners. However, practicing their right was not an issue for them at that time; they accepted the tradition that entailed that women had certain roles as mothers, sisters and wives. These women, when they look at the past now, regret some of the negative aspects of their tradition, such as not allowing women to complete their education. This affected their decisions and how they plan the future for their children. Furthermore, they perceive that education would have helped them in the new society where they held the responsibilities of their children in exile and would put them in a better social class in Egypt. For instance, Fatma said "I have seven children, four of them were already at school and the others were too young to be enrolled." She was able to ensure that her two daughters attended school in Eritrea. Also Stoum mentioned that her father encouraged her to attend school until secondary level and that increased her desire to educate her children. Zainab on the other hand, mentioned her desire as upper and middle class "if we didn't leave Eritrea my children would have been enrolled in the best schools in Asmara like their father, where they learn to speak Italian and English". And for Aisha she is from a Saho tribe and she came to Egypt to complete her university degree, which was unusual at that time in Eritrea.

The constraints of the social structure on these women shaped their gender identity, their lives in Eritrea and their desire in the process of displacement. These women were identified by the society according to their relation to others as being mother and wives. Their role in Eritrea was constricted to the private sphere and was limited to what was acceptable as upper middle class lifestyle or their tradition. They socialized with the

Italian women settlers to learn some skills, and their children went to school. Their life in Eritrea influenced their life and experiences in the displacement process. They did not practice their rights but they were keen to allow their children to enjoy more rights such as education. They did not pass on the role they played in Eritrea as belonging to the private sphere to their daughters. They were determined to ensure that their children had better opportunities through education. Furthermore, the importance of education for their children is related to their social class as upper and middle class and their lifestyle. Finally, their inability to continue their education in Eritrea made it difficult to them to interact with the educated Egyptian women when they moved to Egypt.

### **War from inside and outside:**

Between 1952 and 1962, Ethiopia violated the federation terms and annexed Eritrea. Opposition to the Ethiopian authorities started to form, and coalesced into one group called the Eritrean Liberation Movement, whose members were from the political and upper classes. The second group, called the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), started armed conflict, with the primary goal being the attainment of independence from Ethiopia (Lobban, 1976). The ELF started as a national movement, and did not hold the ideology of eliminating the social class as the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), which split from the (ELF) in the 1970s. Armed clashes started in 1966 and by 1967 when Ethiopian troops launched heavy attacks on the Eritrean opponents. This drove many Eritreans to leave their lands and homes as they were ruined and burned. EPLF's ideology was to carry social transformation within Eritrea as well as gain independence from Ethiopia.

In early 1970s the EPLF started to admit educated women from urban areas. Women's participation in the conflict was seen as a measure of their emancipation. These women started to recruit other women to the army from different villages in Eritrea and even in Sudan where there were large numbers of Eritreans. They gained the opportunity to be educated at academic, political and military levels (Hale, 2001). Bernal (2000) explained that the image of Eritrean women fighters meant that independence and nation building in Eritrea was based on women's inclusion, rather than by excluding them.

However, this inclusion has excluded the cultural bases of womanhood that represented in motherhood, familial roles, and domestic duties. Therefore, the transformation in gender identity was from the women's image as mother, sisters and wives to women fighters; gender identity was identified by the (EPLF) according to their performance as men not according to the women's vision of emancipation. Many of the conservative families prohibited their daughters from joining the struggle whereas other women ran away from their families and joined the struggle voluntarily.

There were upper and middle class Eritreans women who joined the struggle. Three of my interviewees mentioned that they had one or more members of their families who were opponents of the Ethiopian rule. For instance, Zainab mentioned that her uncle was an active member in the ELF and her sister in law ran away twice to join the EPLF. Her brother tried to convince her not to join, but he failed. Fatma stated that her sister joined the armed struggle and it was not accepted easily in the family. They described how the Ethiopian authority burned villages and killed civilians when they searched for the Eritrean opponents. They experienced instability at that time but the EPLF was promoted to gender equality and encouraged women to join armed struggle.

Fatma mentioned two reasons for leaving Eritrea. One was the generalized violence against the Eritreans by the Ethiopian military groups, and for fear of drafting her daughters to the front line by the EPLF. Mariam, Fatma's elder daughter mentioned that they took her and her sisters to the military camp but her grandfather came and brought them back home and they were at the age of 13 and 15. Soad, Fatma's daughter, stated that at the beginning, the EPLF were convincing women to participate in the struggle but at the time when they left Eritrea they were drafting whoever they could to the frontline. Zainab mentioned that she lived in Asmara with her husband and her three children; when they heard that the Ethiopian troops every day choose one area in Asmara and kill Eritreans and taking their houses; they decided to move to Massawa. She recalled that:

“... they were burning my village because they were searching for the Eritrean fighters and they were stealing everything, I run away with my husband and neighbors by boat to Yemen, we almost died”

Her daughter Amna said “it was the right time to leave, it was a decision made by both of my parents”. They left Eritrea through the Red Sea and they stayed two days at the sea until they reached the Yemeni border then entered a small village in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian government let them stay but did not give them any documentation. Soad describes her journey to Sudan. Her family had to move at night by camels and hide in the morning. On their way to Sudan they found a young girl who accompanied them to Sudan. One of the EPLF members was following them and was trying to recruit Fatma’s daughters and the girl who was with them. Finally, he was able to take the young girl, who was running away from being drafted back to Eritrea to join the struggle, but he could not take Soad’s sisters. Therefore, leaving Eritrea was a decision many of these women had to take because of direct threat of violence and as well as the transformations in Eritrea. The new gender identity that was presented by the EPLF was not acceptable by many Eritrean families. The EPLF promoted gender equality without recognizing gender differences.

In the following part I will present the first generation of displaced Eritrean women who are refugees. In the displacement process they were labeled as foreigners / migrants. The decision making of the first generation of Eritrean women to be relocated to Egypt was influenced by their desire to educate their children.

### **Looking for networks: Displacement and multiple relocations:**

Class and socio-economic background are important aspects of social identity and it shape women’s actions and attitudes as well as influence women’s migration. Households and families are driving factors of migration decision making; and migration should be considered as a component of wider group strategies for livelihood and socioeconomic advancement (Massey, 1990). Many scholars noted that there are hierarchies of destination that can be reached, which depend on the socioeconomic backgrounds of migrants. In this part I argue that socioeconomic background and class of the Eritrean

women from the first generation not only influenced migration decision making to certain destinations but also it shaped their migration experience in the host country and their needs.

Networks and social context are factors that influence migrants' decision to choose certain destination (Massey, 1990). The displacement process of the interviewees started with the decline of military situation in Eritrea. Most of the interviewees went to more than one country before arriving to Egypt. The reason stated by these women for moving from one country to another is having family members in the destination country. For instance, Zainab and her family entered Saudi Arabia where her brother and cousins were living; they stayed there for almost three years before coming to Egypt. Fatma said they went to Sudan first, where they acquired UN travel documents and went to Saudi Arabia where her brother was waiting for them. Stoum lived in Saudi Arabia for many years, with her husband and other family members. For these women moving to a country where they had family members was an essential decision making factor Amna describes that, when they arrived in Saudi Arabia, she felt that her mother was protected by family members. Also she describes that seeing familiar faces – she meant family members she used to see in Eritrea - gave her hope that the life they lived in Eritrea was coming back. Massey (1990) noted that migration is costly when the first migrants reach a new destination where they do not have social connection; usually these migrants are from the upper and middle class (Massey, 1990). Most of my interviewees drew upon the obligations of their family members and kinship when moving from one country to another, because the cost of moving to a new location was relatively low when they have family members there. For instance, Fatma mentioned that because her nuclear family is large they were divided between her two brothers. One of her sons was sent to Egypt with other extended family to enter school. Zainab said that her family was also divided in two; her husband and the sons in his sister's house, Zainab and her daughters with her brother.

When the first generation moved to Egypt they left family members in the previous host societies and joined other Eritrean families they knew in Egypt. The breadwinners of these families were often left behind in order to send remittances. The main reason for



choosing Egypt stated by the Eritrean women was education opportunities for their children. For many Eritrean families Egypt provided many benefits; first children would receive a good education; it was not far from Eritrea and close to the breadwinners of these families who were either in Eritrea or in the Gulf countries (Al-Sharmani, 2008).

### **To be or not to be – Refugee or foreigners:**

One of the main issues that came up in the narratives of the first generation of displaced Eritrean women was their status in Egypt: Are they refugee or migrants?

The distinction between forced and voluntary may belie the realities of migration decision making: for at least some refugees, moving is only the start for a range of possible options in terms of destination and status, whilst for at least some labour migrants international migration results from a corporate imposition rather than an individual choice (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001).

The refugee category refers to a group of people sharing a certain legal status; Malkki (1995) refers to it as “an identity” that has led to generalization and essentialization which is less enabling. It ignores the commonalities and differences in the process of displacement that creates refugee. It also differentiates between refugees and exilic persons. Refugees as a group are subject to different representational conventions than exilic persons. For instance, Kaplan (1987) notes that exile carries a kind of freedom and power while refugees are not regarded as searching for freedom or power in quite this way (Malkki, 1995). In most cases of displacement, there are people who did not leave. The poor who cannot cross the border stay and those who can afford leaving flee. Al – Sharmani (2009) argues that one of the reasons for the relocation of refugees from the Middle Eastern countries to Egypt is to escape the problem of legal vulnerability (Al-Sharmani & Grabska, 2009). UNHCR applies a narrow definition of refugees that fails to take into consideration that most displaced persons live a life of multiple movement because they lack rights in different societies.

These women were refugees when they left Eritrea and were labeled and treated as foreigners/ migrants in the process of migration. Being refugees and the subsequent rights did not matter to these women or they were able to cope with it; they were able to depend on their own resources to achieve their goal in exile, which was access to education for their children.

“Life and circumstances forced us to take this decision. We lived in Saudi Arabia without residency for years and my children could not be enrolled in schools without residency” Zainab

This statement was mentioned by one of the Eritrean women from the first generation. She describes that moving to Egypt was the only option she had and it was a mutual decision by both parents. She explained that her uncle came to visit her and he suggested that Zainab and her children move to Egypt where she could find education for her children and have better life circumstances. She agreed with her husband to move to Egypt.

The class and socioeconomic background of the interviewees have influenced their decision making regarding destination countries. Making the decision by the Eritrean women to move to Egypt had an implication on their status as refugees. These women were displaced because of the war. However, they did not have legal residency in the previous hosting countries; and they could not enroll their children to schools. These women depended on their own resources to move to Egypt and they moved as migrants. Only Fatma’s children had refugee status while they were in Sudan and they were able to benefit from UNHCR services in Egypt. Zainab mentioned that she applied for UNHCR when she came to Egypt and she was rejected because they lived in Saudi Arabia for a while and Egypt was not their first country of asylum. However, the lack of refugee status did not have a major impact on the lives of the Eritrean women, as will be explained later.

Education was an important desire of the Eritrean families from the first generation. The reason for that is, they were aware that the new elite in Eritrea is no longer characterized by the affiliation to certain tribe or certain family but by acquiring

education which is the new elite that of the modern world. They moved from one location to another to be able to meet this desire. It is important to note that the desire to educate their children was not the reason to leave Eritrea. The war compelled them to leave, but coming to Egypt was a choice they made for educational opportunities.

These women constructed a different identity in the diaspora than the one they had in Eritrea. Zainab explained “no one forces us to take this decision but life that forced us to take this decision; I put my life aside for my children”. This represents the situation of most of the Eritrean women in Egypt. They sacrificed their marriage lives to educate their children. They chose to lead transnational lives and be away from their husbands for years, taking on a double parental role. Additionally, as heads of households in Egypt new responsibilities and skills were demanded of them.

Citing education as priority for the children of the Eritrean women in Egypt has implication for their status and reflects many things. First, their desire to educate their children distinguishes them from the newly displaced Eritreans and other displaced populations in Egypt in the last two decades like Somalis, Ethiopians and Sudanese, who prioritized basic needs such as food and rent (Al- Sharmani, 2003; Hashim, 2010). Despite the fact that the interviewees cannot return to their country of origin because of the war; and they seek protection when they fled their country, being able to make the decision to move to Egypt moved them from the refugee category to be migrants, where they could make choices where to live for reasons beyond seeking international protection. It also reflects that they do not recognize themselves as refugees and they challenge the stereotype of refugees who seek protection and depend on service providers. Second, they give a meaning for their displacement by citing education as the primary reason for living in exile, not the war as reason for their displacement. Amna mentioned that her mother usually says “what we will say if we were asked what were you doing in exile”. She said “as if these women going to be asked what they accomplished by living in exile”. Third, their socioeconomic background as upper and middle class in Eritrea influenced their desire and shaped their need to give better opportunities to their children. Moreover, the first generation of Eritrean women did not have educational opportunities in Eritrea and they regretted the negative aspect of their

tradition that restricted women from completing their education that would have benefited them in the displacement process. For this reason, they saw education is important for their children.

During the first Eritrea-Ethiopian war, Eritrea was going through a social transformation. Women fighters were having roles in transforming their lives and participating in conflicts to free the nation. Women from the first generation were part of this transformation, which was affected by the displacement process and by the ties with the homeland. They wanted to give meaning to their displacement. Migration offered social advancement to them and their families.

### **Shadow of the past influence their experience in Egypt:**

Castle and Davidson (2000) note that migrants become a part of an “ethnic minority” according to definition and understanding of the self within the mainstream society. “Self definition of the ethnic group evolves by shared language, traditions, religion, history and experience”. Other definition which is relevant to the concept of social exclusion includes ideological process of stereotyping, as well as discriminatory structures and practice in legal, economic, social and political arenas (Hassan, 2006).

Sen (2000) argues that a person is socially excluded if this person is geographically resident in a society and is not able to participate in the normal activities of citizens for reasons beyond his control (Hassan, 2006). In Egypt, all foreigners and refugees are socially excluded. Marginality in the Egyptian context means that an individual is economically, culturally, legally, politically and socially excluded; they have limited access to basic rights. Marginality as it is described by Berry (1997) refers to the tendency to be shut off from both traditions, having few or no connections to improve positive social support and recognition (Grabska, 2005). Furthermore, it is a two way process of being excluded from the host community and the person excluding himself from the host community.

One of the major reasons for Eritrean women’s self exclusion is the social attitudes of the host community, which did not tolerate diversity or expected assimilation. Zainab when she described her relation with the Egyptian community mentioned that she

could not interact with them because of how they perceive her “Here in Egypt they don’t know who you are and what your background is and even if you tell them they don’t understand it”. Most of the Eritrean women from the first generation made similar statements. The loss of previous social status they had in Eritrea affected their interaction with the Egyptian society. In Eritrea a person identifies her/himself according to who belongs to certain families within a certain tribe within a certain regions in Eritrea. Eritrean women were no longer being able to introduce themselves in this context. In describing their relations with the Egyptian communities a points of contradiction arose. They all stated that they do not have any problem interacting with Egyptians, especially their neighbors, and the mothers of their children’s friends. They stated that they have positive relations with them. However, this did not explain the limited interaction with them, in term of socializing. Zainab describes that when she first came to Egypt she could no longer introduce herself to the host society as a person from certain family, tribe and class because Egyptians would not understand that. One of the reasons stated for having limited interaction with Egyptians is the perceived image by the hosting community which assumes that Eritreans came from rural areas. That affected how Eritrean women communicated with the Egyptian society. For instance, Zainab mentioned “some of the neighbors treat us as we are from lower class, they don’t even reply the greeting, and in Eritrea we value each other not like here.” Fatma similarly stated that “even when we greeting the neighbor they don’t reply back.” Therefore, one of the major reasons of having limited interactions was the perceived image of the Eritreans and they were not welcomed by the host society.

The daughters of the first generation mentioned other reasons for the limited interaction between their mothers and the host community. Lamia explained that “Egyptian mothers especially the educated and employed ones, they only socialized with women from the same class, and our mothers were perceived from different social class because they were not educated” Soad stated another reason for her mother and other Eritrean women she knows to have limited interactions with Egyptians: “They didn’t know how to interact, there is culture gap between both, they didn’t integrate with the Egyptian life style.” Language is a barrier that limited her mothers’ interaction with the

Egyptian society. As Fatma did not speak Arabic when she came to Egypt and she did not have Eritrean neighbors when she first came. It was difficult for her to interact with the surroundings to manage her life. Her daughter Soad mentioned that some of the neighbors helped her and asked her if she needed any help. Then she moved to another area where other Eritreans lived nearby. Amna said that the reason her mother did not interact with the Egyptian neighbors is that she found her family and other Eritreans that she socialized with them and Eritrean from the first generation depended on their closed community circle. Halema stated that her mother was struggling with her six children and she did not have time to socialize except with Eritreans who gave her a sense of support.

Most of my participants lived in middle class areas in Egypt. They were not perceived by host community as a threat to the labour market or an economic burden. Their financial resources enable them to remain outside the Egyptian economy. Furthermore, living in a middle class area saved the participants from exposure to harassment unlike those who live in poor areas. However, they have limited resources. As mentioned before, they depend on remittances from different family members and the amount fluctuates over time. They have to cope with the financial changes and be creative in managing their limited resources.

One of the negative aspects of the interaction between Eritrean women and the Egyptian society is when they deal with the landlord. All the interviewees share the view that landlords think that Eritreans came from rural areas and try to convince them that they are renting the best houses, even though these rented houses are unsuitable and unclean. Furthermore, they have to negotiate with the landlords on the date of paying the rent. For instance, Stoum said “I used to have an agreement before renting the house, I tell the landlord I will pay the rent in the half of the month because money takes time to come to me.” Eritrean women from this generation stayed in Egypt for almost three decades. It was common that they move from one rented apartment to another because the landlord demanded their apartments after a period of time.

Stoum mentioned that “Eritrean mothers who lived in Egypt are different from those who lived in other places; Eritreans who live in Sudan they have a similar life to Eritrea, those

who live in the Gulf they have their husbands to help them, those who live in the West they have the support and the services they need, Eritrean women in Egypt they struggle for their children.” Living in Egypt with limited financial resources is something these women experienced for the first time. They learned how to deal with it. Most of the women mentioned that securing the annual tuition for schools was the most important thing; then securing money for rent. When they faced financial difficulties in meeting their needs they usually sold their jewelry to cover their expenses, and reduce their expenses by sewing clothes for their children. Borrowing money was another strategy. They either borrowed from other family members in Egypt or they borrowed from women from other communities. For instance Zainab said “I had an Iraqi friend and we would borrow money from each other and this was new to me, I never needed to borrow money back home but in Egypt I learned to borrow money and to save money and try to decrease my expenses in order to live.”

#### **Relations with the Egyptian government:**

Being a single mother in Egypt with children made women take on new responsibilities. One of these responsibilities was to deal with the Egyptian government. That was a new experience for Eritrean women. They had to ensure legal residency in Egypt. All the women did not encounter problems in obtaining or renewing their residency. They stated that they obtained residency through enrolling their children in schools; even those who had UNHCR protection had to get a letter from their schools to get residency. Zainab mentioned that during the 1980s she did not have the money to renew her residency and she stayed for three years without residency and she never felt insecure or encountered any problem. Also Fatma mentioned that after the independent of Eritrea her family lost UNHCR protection. They stayed for two years without residency until her daughter was enrolled at Al-Azhar university and she could obtain residency. Unlike the other women, Stoum describes that her three sons did not have residency after finishing their high school because they could not be enrolled in universities. They used to come home late which was a point of distress for her that they might encounter any problem for being illegally resident in Egypt. Egypt is considered a safe space for many non-Egyptians who do not have legal residency especially before the 25<sup>th</sup> January

uprising in Egypt, many non- Egyptian including the participants moved freely in Egypt (Al-Sharmani & Grabska, 2009).

Intersections of race, language and class are reasons for exclusion and self-exclusion in Egypt as noted in the interviews above. The context of their reception in Egypt had influenced their coping mechanism with the experience of foreignness and forced them into disadvantaged positions. Eritrean women are recognized, because of language barriers and physical appearance some of the women dress differently, which distinguishes them from the host society, or have different skin color. They were considered a visible minority and the host society placed them in an inferior social position, relegating these women to marginalized status (Hassan, 2006). Eritrean women limited their interaction with the host society because of the difficulty they face in interaction and they want to hold their own culture and identity (Al-Sharmani, 1998). Denoting these women as foreigners from rural areas and inferior social class, adding to that the exclusion policies of the Egyptian government to long resident non- Egyptians, leads these women to exclude themselves from the host community and depend on their own networks and community.

Accessing services and gaining legal rights did not matter to these first generation female headed households as their economic life was defined by remittances. The resources they had enabled their children to be educated and to be partially integrated into the host community. It is important to distinguish between actual and perceived lack of rights and marginalization. All non- Egyptians have limited rights. All the interviewees shared in the view that they do not have rights in Egypt because they are foreigners. Zainab stated “We don’t have any rights in Egypt, I’m a stranger.” Fatma said, “I can’t work; we are not allowed to work in Egypt. We are foreigners.” The more significant rights to these women in Egypt are education, health and social life and they were excluded from these rights. To their second generation Draughts, however, rights in Egypt are important such as citizenship and the right to work. This will be explained further in the next chapter.



Interacting with the Eritrean communities and other displaced communities in Egypt is a way for the Eritrean women to resist the marginality and the lack of social life within the host community. In the next part I will show how being part of Eritrean communities in Egypt, interacting with other displaced communities such as Iraqis, Palestinians and Yemenis, and being a part of a transnational community was essential for the creation of positive collective identities in Egypt that played a major role in the lives of their children.

### **Interaction with the Eritrean communities in Egypt:**

One of the main issues facing displaced persons is identity discontinuity as a result of disruption of place attachment. Displaced populations, therefore, attempt to create a sense of identity continuity through recognizing and redefining their shared past. Nostalgia is one way to maintain the identity continuity of displaced person (Milligan, 2003). Place attachment refers to the emotional link to a specific site through whose identity is maintained. Eritrean women are identified as “foreigners” in the host society as a social identity. Sometime this person accepts this social identity by coping with it. Being part of the Eritrean communities in Egypt is one way of dealing with their foreignness. Eritreans in Egypt are heterogeneous groups from different tribes and regions in Eritrea. However, in Egypt they all interact together to create one small community that interacted together regardless of differences in ethnic and class background. The one common thing they have is that they were Eritreans who lived in Egypt.

Family ties in Eritrea are very strong and they are utilized by Eritrean diasporas. The power of the extended family in Eritrea did not get much scholarly attention and it is not included in the literature on Eritrean diasporas. It is related to identity and how a person identifies him/her self in Eritrea of being part of large family. Eritreans who left Eritrea during the war did not experience the process of social change and nation-building in Eritrea which focused on creating social equality and participation across clan, ethnic, religion, gender and class lines (Harber, 1997) and diminish the power of family ties and tribes.

In the context of displacement, livelihood is comprised of capabilities, assets and activities obtain by the displaced person to sustain his life (Grabska, 2005). The living conditions of Eritrean women are similar to the diasporic Somalis in Cairo. Both are a part of transnational families and communities which are essential for their survival in Egypt. Remittances are one of the important transnational activities for the survival of Eritrean families. One of the new responsibilities of the Eritrean women in Egypt is being responsible for financial affairs. All my interviewees depend on remittances from their husbands or other family members who live in different countries. These women mentioned that they experience financial difficulties when the breadwinner loses his job, which means these women have to negotiate their space and transnational life when managing the households. One way is to depend on other family members to share the financial burden. It is considered an obligation to support other vulnerable family members. Being a woman with children is a high priority for financial support by the extended family. Another way is to take on more responsibilities by hosting other extended family members in their house and they receive more remittances from other extended family

As mentioned, Eritrean women from the first generation have limited interaction with the host society. They preferred to socialize with their own communities, where they had a sense of belonging and can practice their culture and regain their social status within the Eritrean communities in exile. The connection within the community is an effort by the member of this community to fill the gap of unmet needs from the host society and address their own needs (Leila Helal & Samy, 2008). There were facilities available within the Eritrean community during the late 1970s and 1980s, such as the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) diplomatic office and the Eritrean Student Union (ESU). Both offices provided information about educational opportunities in Egypt and they provided assistance such as facilitating the entry of some Eritreans into public schools, and issuing birth certificates, and issuing passports. Both offices had good relations with the Egyptian government and embassies of Arab countries, which granted monetary support to the Eritrean students in Egypt. Both the ELF and ESU secured Egyptian

government scholarships for university students as part of solidarity. However, most of the facilities were targeting the children and young youth.

Most of the Eritreans live in areas with other family members or Eritreans they knew previously. Being near each other gives them a sense of security and support and it serves as a way to socialize, network and exchange information about home, and services available in the host community. A kin-based network is significant coping mechanism that the Eritrean women use to deal with their marginality. Most of the Eritreans pool resources from other family members or from the community. Eritrean women depend on the wider community to access educational opportunities and residency. In informal ad hoc assistance such as borrowing money they depend on their extended family members inside and outside Egypt. They also develop a tool where they collect money for those who are in need within the community.

“When our children go to schools, the women who lived nearby gather and drink coffee” Zainab

Fatma describes one of the important practices for the Eritrean community in Egypt is coffee gatherings. She mentioned that in Eritrea women used to gather in the evening around coffee; she said it was important for her to continue practicing drinking coffee in Egypt. Zainab explained that it is a gesture of hospitality to meet guests with coffee. They all agreed that coffee reminded them of home and it is important to continue practicing this custom. Stoum mentioned that in Eid time she did not feel in exile, because all the Eritreans in the neighborhood visit each other and their children play together. Also most of the interviewees mentioned that during funerals all Eritreans in the neighborhood and relatives stay with each other for three days to support each other in exile. There is a strong conviction among Eritrean families that children born and raised in host countries should learn their mother tongue, and share a national consciousness (Al-Ali, Black, & Koser, 2001). All my interviewees emphasize the importance in passing their culture to their children. They always remind their children that they are Eritrean and they practice the different Eritrean languages at homes. Most of the second generation either speak their mother tongue or understand it. Zainab mentioned that she

came to Egypt with her extended family, which made it easy for her to practice the traditional aspect of the Eritrean culture. It also made it easy for her children to acknowledge that they are Eritreans play with other Eritreans living in the same neighborhood, and live a different life from the host community. Despite the fact that Eritrean women are being socially marginalized they chose to exclude themselves. Limited interaction may not only come from the hosting community but also from the Eritrean women who have their own community and network that provides them with the support they needed.

One of the major changes in the role of Eritrean women in Egypt is that they became more independent and play the role of both parents. Stoum said that “all decisions concerning my children I was taking them,” even with the presence of the male member or the male breadwinner. Taking daily decisions allows Eritrean women to enhance their skills. All my interviewees learned different skills, for instance Zainab took Arabic and English classes, and she also continued learning handicraft. Stoum continued her Arabic education and finished the first years in high school. Fatma learned to read and write Arabic and the Qur’an. Aisha is now working in handicraft, and she finished her education.

### **Interacting with other displaced communities:**

Most of my interviewees mentioned that they socialize with other women from Palestine, Iraq, Yemenis, Libyan and Sudanese. For instance, Stoum mentioned that when she used to travel to Saudi Arabia and leave her children alone, her Iraqi neighbor used to take care of them. Zainab mentioned that she has Iraqi and Palestinian neighbors which whom she socialized regularly and their children play together and study at the same school. In general, most of my interviewees felt more comfortable socializing with other communities in Egypt than the host community. The reason for that is they share common experiences in the host community: they all are foreigners, they have children who go to the same schools, and they cannot return to their countries of origin. Furthermore, they accept the cultural differences in each other, and they share the same

facilities and information in the host society and their children accept easily that they are different from the host society and these are children who are different as well.

“We know the situation in Eritrea is bad but we all need to return so we make the situation better, if everyone said we will return after the situation gets better then it will never get better.” This statement was mentioned by Aisha when she was describing the situation of Eritrean diasporas.

Many of the interviewees from the first generation stated that they did not have the desire to remain in exile; it was a temporary move. They did not expect to live in Egypt permanently. They were expecting to return after the situation become better in Eritrea. All my interviewees stated that they had the chance to be resettled to Europe or North America but they declined these opportunities. All the interviewees mentioned that they did not want to be resettled in a third country because their inability to raise their children alone in a country where they did not know the language and which is far from other family members who live in the Middle East. For instant, Zainab mentioned “How would I live with my four children in a foreign country away from my family, I will not be able to do it.” She also mentioned that she did not expect that the war in Eritrea will take such a long time. Her daughter Amna said that her mother’s decisions depended on the surroundings. She explained that having her extended family in Egypt - five houses headed by Amna’s aunts with their children and their young siblings who are studying in Egypt - influenced her mother’s decision. She mentioned that her mother rejected many migration opportunities just to be near her family in Egypt.

Rejection of migration opportunities to a third country by the first generation illustrates another aspect of migration decision making. Eritrean women make the choice not to migrate to a third country at this point based on their personal characteristics, performance and constraints that are influenced by the socioeconomic surroundings. The notion of the parents that they are temporary guests in Egypt and they will return home was not passed on the children. All my interviewees from the second generation emphasize that their parents did not focus on the idea of returning to Eritrea. Both Halema and Amna said “we were never told that we will be back to neither Eritrea nor

leaving to third country we came to stay.” Nadia mentioned that although her parents did not emphasize the notion of return they were keen to tell her that she is not an Egyptian and she is different from the host community.

The process of displacement changes the meaning of home in the context of trying to re-construct a new home outside the homeland while still maintaining connections and options of return (Sadek, 2007). The current situation in Eritrea does not send a positive signal and does not encourage planning to return. Most of displaced persons are under the influence of memories of home; but they do not remain prisoners of their past (Kunz, 1981). For Zainab, the instability in Eritrea was not the reason to stay in Egypt; she describes that the home she knew does no longer exists. She does not consider returning to Eritrea as “our homes and land have been destroyed, all my family members are scattered around the world even if I return back I will not feel home.” She also defines home in term of being close to her children and other family members. She mentions that this is not feasible in Eritrea because of the political situation.

The current Eritrean government who led the thirty years of struggle had the ideology of gender equality and emancipations of women. Women fighters experienced equality, freedom and empowerment during the war (Upshon, 2007). Encouraging women to join the armed struggle was supposed to eliminate all the differences between social categories and encourage women to become contributing actors to the society. Taxes posed by the Eritrean government are one way to distinguish between who is a citizens and who is not, and between who has rights and who does not have any. Eritrean women who lived in Egypt mentioned that they do not pay the taxes because they cannot afford to; because they are depending on other family member who pay the taxes. Those who do not pay the taxes are excluded from the government’s assistance and facilities. The Eritrean government has contradiction in its ideology, on the one hand, it wants to emancipate women from their traditional role and eliminate the social classes. And on the other hand, it created two categories: contributed citizens who get all rights, and women who are outlaws outside Eritrea.

Zainab mentioned that the conditions in Eritrea do not encourage her to return. She has two sons who live abroad. It is easier for her sons to visit her in Egypt as one of

them cannot return to Eritrea. Also her health condition prevents her from returning to Eritrea. Furthermore, she is worried that her daughter would be drafted to the military. Her daughter works in Egypt and support the family financially. If they return in Eritrea, they will be dependent on her sons financially.

When I asked Stoum about returning to Eritrea, she raised an interesting point that will be excluded from her rights as citizen, because she does not pay the 2% taxes. She believes that women ex- fighters are in a better position in Eritrea. Being involved in the struggle granted them education and work opportunities along with other rights they enjoy in Eritrea as productive and contributing citizens. She added that if she wanted access any services, especially work, she needs to do national services such as cleaning the streets, which she refuses to do. She said “they want us to pay the price because we didn’t participate in the war and left, but we also suffered from displacement and lived out of our country, we had another kind of battle.” She added that her three sons would not be able to visit her in Eritrea. Therefore, she prefers to stay in Egypt until she can lives with one of her sons.

Fatma lives with her daughter Soad. Neither have residency in Egypt. Fatma wishes to return to Eritrea and her sons can visit her there. Her daughter Soad does not want to return so they have to live in Egypt. Fatma considers Egypt as home for her but she regrets the fact that she does not have any rights in Egypt and does not have the freedom of movement. Fatma said that she wanted to be free to move between Eritrea and Egypt; she wants to be able to visit her family members who live in Eritrea.

On the other hand, Aisha has a different point of view. She perceives the main problem with the Eritrean diasporas is that Eritreans lost their identity as Eritreans, and their belonging shifted to the country they live in. Furthermore, she thinks that the educated generation did not fulfill its duty of preserving the Eritrean identity. She describes the situation in Eritrea do not respect the Muslims, the system forces Muslim women to be drafted to the military or they will be denied access to services. Therefore, the policies of the Eritrean government limit the role of these women. She added that she wishes to return to Eritrea because this is how the situation will change. She mentioned

that she is willing to work in Eritrea when she returns. Their narratives revealed the paradox of their situation. These women were socially excluded from the host community, and they did not enjoy many rights. Being socially excluded did not affect them much; they learned to live with these circumstances and depended on their network. Moreover, they excluded themselves in return. In contrast, being socially excluded from their own country affected their prospect of return. They felt that they would be excluded from many rights in Eritrea which are available to other women.

Egypt is considered the new home because their sons can visit them there and their daughters can live, work and manage a stable life in Egypt. The sense of security and stability enables these women to establish a new home in Egypt. Although some of my interviewees do not have residency, they generally felt safe in Egypt and they did not face any incidents to raise their sense of insecurity. Unlike the first wave of Eritreans in Egypt, some of the displaced populations such as Sudanese and Iraqis do not feel safe in Egypt and some reported that they encounter many incidents of insecurity. Most of the women define home in term of being close to their sons and other family members. Returning to Eritrea for most of these women is not feasible because of the human rights situation and political situation do not enable the sons to enter Eritrea freely. The meaning of home to these women is linked to their family ties; it is no longer related to the homeland.

Fatma said “One thing is making me sad that now I can’t visit my family in Eritrea and my sons can’t visit me freely.”

The situation in Egypt has changed after the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution in 2011. Many Eritreans from the first and the second generation were renewing their residency through the Eritrean embassy in Egypt by paying 250\$ every year<sup>4</sup>. After the revolution and the increasing problems of the Eritrean refugees in Egypt, the Egyptian government ceased to issue residency through the Eritrean embassy. That situation forced many Eritreans either to remain without residency or to acquire Somali or Sudanese passports

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<sup>4</sup> These women renew their residency through the embassy because they no longer can have educational residency.



so they can have residency in Egypt. They consider Egypt as a temporary home for Eritrean women from the first generation. However, the lack of residency made them think of other alternatives where they feel more secure. Furthermore, their family members who wish to visit them in Egypt now have difficulties to obtain visas to enter Egypt.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter focused on Eritrean women who were displaced in Egypt from the first generation. My findings highlight that the experience of the Eritrean women was shaped by social exclusion and marginalization in Egypt. However, their limited access to rights did not increase their vulnerability in Egypt. The most important right was access to education for their children and, since they had achieved it, they did not acknowledge any deprivation of rights. Their experience indicates that they do not perceive themselves as passive victims; they constructed the meaning of home and they put education for their children as the goal they must achieve and most of them succeeded. In the next chapter I will focus on the narrative of the second generation. The social exclusion of the first generation did not impact negatively on the integration of the second generation in Egypt. Furthermore, being resident in Egypt for a long time but not being eligible for citizenship or permanent residence shaped the second generation's plans for future. I will explain how the transnational life the first generation lived is rejected by the second generation.

## Chapter Three: Second Generation's Processes of Integration: Education

### Introduction:

The purpose of the next two chapters is to present the narrative of seven women from the second generation of Eritreans, some of whom were born in Egypt and others who grew up in Egypt. These narratives provide information that is relevant to my argument that the marginalization experience of the mothers from the first generation did not affect negatively on the process of integration of the second generation. I will argue in this chapter that in the lives of transnational families of the second generation shaped their choices and decisions on issues such as marriages and migration. Having the opportunities of education had a great impact on the process of integration socially and economically in the host society and on their perception regarding being part of the host community. It also shaped their sense of belonging and identity.

The children of the first generation of Eritrean women who came to Egypt in the late 1970s and early 1980s grew up in Cairo and lived there for more than two decades. Their ages varied between 20 and 40. Some of this generation experienced the displacement process from Eritrea and multiple movements through two or three countries. Others never visited Eritrea; Egypt is the only home they know.

Citizenship means membership in a certain society; it includes a wide range of rights such as civil, political and social rights. The concept of citizenship is based on cultural belonging and political belonging and there is a contradiction in the citizenship model between the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups. The concept is challenged by groups who are in the territories but are not included in the nation- state. They are either denied the right of citizenship or must undergo the process of assimilation to belong to this nation. Even when they have citizenship rights they are denied some significant political rights such as voting which prevents them from being full citizens and have a sense of belonging.

Globalization and peoples' international mobility also pose challenges to the concept of citizenship and belonging. People belong to more than one nation, and have

multiple citizenships and do not live in their country of citizenship. Other people like the second generation of Eritrean women cannot be citizens in the country of their residency, even though they live permanently in Egypt. The situation of the second generation of Eritrean women reveals a unique situation of non-Egyptian ethnic minority living in Egypt perceives themselves as part of the Egyptian community. They practice that citizenship as middle class Egyptians do. i.e. accessing some rights such as education and employment as middle class Egyptians.

Castles & Davidson (2000) noted that a democratic state means the inclusion and participation of all members living in the territories. I agree with them regarding the importance of rethinking citizenship rights. Citizenship should be based on residence in a state's territory with other substantial links such economic involvement and cultural participation. Furthermore, the recognition from the mainstream society of individual differences is important to the idea of belonging to any state. The situation of the second generation is placed between their belonging to more than one nation they live in Egypt, sharing the same culture and economic resources; but are part of transnational lives where they practice their own culture and connect with their own families who live abroad. Therefore, they have a sense of belonging in two places. They perceive themselves as economically and culturally integrated into Egyptian society but have collective differences as Eritreans living in Egypt.

This study shows that the second generation is more successful than their parents in being partially integrated into the host society. Although they are treated as foreigners in Egypt, they have adequate access to education and to the labour market in Egypt as middle class Egyptians. The second generation has employed the services offered by their own community and by the host community to secure their livelihood and have better life opportunities in Egypt. However, it highlights the complexity of the situation of the second generation and it raises an important issue, which is the right of people who lived in a country for a long time. In the same context the policies of the host country that promote the notion of temporariness hinders the notion of integration. This issue is directly linked to the concept of citizenship. I argue that the lack of citizenship rights influences the second generations' sense of belonging and their decision to migrate

especially after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution in Egypt. For the second generation to have full membership in Egypt is important because they are in the situation of perceiving themselves as citizens without citizenship rights.

The study also shows that there is a gender specific possibility of integration in Egypt among Eritreans from the second generation. The second generation of Eritrean women has different experiences than their brothers in Egypt. Women are more successful in completing their high school education in Egypt and have more opportunities to enter Egyptian universities and the Egyptian labour market. Their brothers face difficulties in those areas which affected negatively their process of integration and influenced their decision to leave Egypt. Based on that, Eritreans families in Egypt made distinction between male and female in migration opportunities, because of the perception that the male is the breadwinner. If Eritrean males face difficulties in completing their education and finding work opportunities in Egypt therefore migration opportunities were given to the male members in the family.

The second generation has a sense of belonging to Egypt, and they want to become members of the communities within this territory. This affected the aspiration to family formation for the second generation. They reject some aspects and integral parts of their lives such as being part of transnational families. The second generation of Eritrean women in Egypt refuses to replicate the transnational lives of their parents. They no longer accept transnational marriages where they live separately from their spouses. That influences their choices of future partners.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I give a brief description of the situation of the second generation of Eritrean women and citizenship rights. I examine the process of integration of the second generation through focusing on two sub themes: one is educational attainment; the other is access to employment. In the second section, I analyze how the parents' transnational lives have influenced their choices and the decisions that are made by the daughters in future marriages. In the concluding section of the chapter, I highlight the link between rights of citizenship and the migration process; and the challenges of their relations.

### **Debate over citizenship:**

On the theoretical level, this chapter raises several important issues related to the concept of citizenship in the context of Egypt. First, it challenges the concept itself and it gives new meaning to citizenship rights. My argument is that the second generation of Eritrean women practices Egyptian citizenship in term of social rights without acquiring legal citizenship. They are able to access many rights as most upper and middle class Egyptians, such as education and employment. Furthermore, they are socially integrated into the host society. However, there are some rights they cannot practice such as freedom of movement outside Egypt and political rights.

Citizenship has traditionally been exclusive to those who belong to a particular state in a particular territory. Citizenship acquisition is determined according to two principles: right of the blood and right of the soil (Kondo, 2001). Citizenship can be disaggregated into four elements: legal status, rights, participation and belonging. Being a citizen means having access to services and benefits, being able to vote and to work in political office. It means having obligations such as paying taxes and defending the country. The concept of citizenship is about justice, equality and national cohesion. Migration poses challenges to the notions of citizenship, the existence of people from diverse linguistic, ethnic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds question the notion of the citizenship of long time residents (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakul, 2008). Including others into nation- states pose a threat to this nation because it means that the rights of others must be recognized. The debates on citizenship reflect the tension between participation or the political aspect and the legal status (Bloemraad, Korteweg, & Yurdakul, 2008). Veit Bader (1997) noted that citizenship is multilayered and multiple, for achieving full membership and equality there are two components: first, the acquisition of citizenship and its inclusion of new population; second, the institutionalized of citizenship on the political, legal and social levels (Juteau, 1997). Most nations assimilate the others instead of recognizing the differences of this other, which are fundamental for his identity (Means, 2009). Many countries who apply the right of blood principle have in the last decade expanded their laws to include the principle of the right of the soil to avoid disenfranchising second and third generation populations who lived permanently in the country (Kondo, 2001).

Immigration policies affect the process of integration and assimilation. These have change in many countries and the rights of long-term residents have improved in many countries. Castles and Miller (2009) noted that since 1945 immigration policies can be divided into three major categories. The first segment of countries treated immigrants as future citizens such as Sweden and the US. The second segment treated immigrants from former colonies as citizens and from other countries as less favorable, however naturalizations were generally allowed such as UK and France. The third segment, countries were reluctant to secure residency status and the process of naturalization was restricted such as Germany -which is ethnic basis for citizenship- and Switzerland.

### **Membership without citizenship rights:**

In order to understand the benefits and the limits of the citizenship right in Egypt, it is important to address what it means to be an Egyptian citizen, what civil, political, social and cultural rights are being practiced by the middle class Egyptians<sup>5</sup>, and how much does citizenship matter outside the political sphere? What does the possession and lack of citizenship in terms of economic and political opportunities for long term residence in Egypt? Which rights are practiced by different categories of noncitizens? (Brubake, 1999).

Theoretically all Egyptians are eligible for all the above rights but they are not practiced by the migrants (Brubake, 1999). In Egypt, citizenship can be acquired by descent. Citizenship law does not allow for naturalization; therefore migrants cannot enjoy full integration into the Egyptian society. Egypt is similar to the German model of citizenship in applying the right of blood principle before it modified the law to incorporate the second generation migrants. It is important to make distinction between social rights and political rights. Practicing social rights enhances sense of belonging for the second generation of Eritrean women in Egypt, while the lack of political rights weakened their membership and participation in the host society. In Egypt, regardless of the length of the residency of migrants and their descendants, they are ineligible for the right of citizenship. The possession of citizen rights does not mean the effectiveness of

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<sup>5</sup> I have choose middle class because it will give more understanding of how second generation are better integrated in Egypt and it will add to the discourse of membership in the Egyptian society.

these rights especially in the political sphere. Brubaker explain that citizenship status does not have a significant impact on the economic and social sphere and what matters the most for long term residents are life opportunities and their ability to access labor market, housing and education. He argues that this can lead to the economic and social marginalization of some groups. I argue that citizenship has little meaning to a group of people who cannot access to rights such as the second generation of Eritrean women. Second generation Eritreans was not economically and socially marginalized, they have life opportunities as middle class Egyptian. Citizenship right has no significant meaning in term of accessing services for many upper and middle class Egyptians because they can pay for high quality of these services. For example, upper and middle class Egyptians are keen to educate their children in private language schools instead of free public education. Also in terms of accessing work their education paves the way for easy access to the private labour market. Eritreans from the second generation are similar to the middle class Egyptian in accessing education and labour market. Nevertheless Egyptian citizens have the right to access many services freely but they do not use them but the Eritreans from the second generation they lack this choice, they have to pay for any services they use. Political rights such as voting were not significant right to be practiced due to lack of democracy by many Egyptians of the same age of Eritreans from the second generation. Plurality, on the other hand, is not fully understood by the Egyptian society. In order for foreigner to be integrated and accepted by the mainstream society, he/she should not have any distinguishing characteristics from the Egyptian society, especially in language or physical appearance. This reveals the limitation of long term residence status in Egypt.

After the 25<sup>th</sup> January revolution 2011, practicing full membership for many Egyptian became more important especially from the same age of the second generation at all levels, especially on the political level. The lack of political rights for the Eritrean women from the second generation made them feel excluded in some aspect and from the mainstream society. Some of the interviewees mentioned that not being able to acquire nationality made them to leave or attempt to leave Egypt, especially after the revolution. The lack of citizenship rights and especially political rights – such as voting after the revolution - led to their marginalization. This right was not significant and not practiced

by most of the Egyptian middle class prior to the revolutions, but became more important afterwards because of the revolution.

Eritreans from the second generation face differential exclusion, which means that they are integrated into certain areas of the society such as education and the labor market but are denied access to other areas such as political participation. Two of my interviewees expressed interest in being politically involved in Egypt, Nadia and Lamia. “I would have stayed in Egypt if I have full rights like any other Egyptian, I couldn’t put 5 years plan for my future like my Egyptian friends who knows what they will do after they finish their studies.” Lamia

The possession of citizen rights for the second generation is important. Their ineligibility for Egyptian citizenship regardless of the length of their stay in Egypt has affected their sense of belonging in Egypt. Although they perceive themselves as socially integrated and they enjoy some rights like upper and middle class Egyptians, their enjoyment of these rights is limited because they are foreigners. Lamia grew up and finished her education in Egypt, and is now living in the US. She is interested in politics and was involved with one of the newspapers that belong to the Muslim brotherhood called El Sha’b during the 1990s. At an early age she discovered that because she is not an Egyptian citizen, she would have limited rights in the future. The lack of citizenship rights affected her sense of belonging and influenced her future decision. She describes her life in Egypt as a reaction where she did not have choice and she could not plan for her future. Through the years she lived in Egypt she was searching for the meaning of home. She describes that she got involved with different project concerning street children and orphans. She knew about politics more than her Egyptian friends; but whenever she discussed politics and criticizes the system of the previous government her friends used to tell her “we criticize our country but you can’t.” She explained that this attitude from her Egyptian friends provoked her because she considers herself as an Egyptian and she criticized her country.

“In paper and on governmental level I know I’m not Egyptian and I’m constantly reminded by this fact when I renew my residency every year, but on the social level I’m treated as an Egyptian, never faced situation that I question my identity, until the



revolution, some of my friends ask why you participate in the revolution you are not Egyptian and if you are caught by the police you will be deported” Nadia

Nadia was born in Saudi Arabia and came to Egypt at the age of two. She completed her studies at an Egyptian university, and she is also interested in politics. She is active in attending lectures in both religion and politics. She is involved with some civil society projects. All her life she considered herself as Egyptian, she explained that complexity of her sense of belonging as being a productive member in the Egyptian society and the limitation of this membership. She explained that she has access to education and the labour market as her Egyptian friends. She explained that there are cultural differences between her and her Egyptian friends but she noted “there is cultural differences but, for me and many of Eritreans in my age we knew how to manage this gap, when we perform as Egyptian and when we are Eritreans, Eritrea is the country of my parents and it is cultural we practice to deal with the limitation of being citizen in Egypt.” Practicing political right for her was not significant before the 25th revolution. However, she felt excluded from mainstream society after the revolution because she could not be politically active as her other Egyptian friends who are involved in different political parties that were formed after the revolution or vote in the elections during the year 2011- 2012.

Discussion on the right of citizenship has raised issues of belonging and the complexity that the second generation feels. They are feeling as native and they are socially treated as native<sup>6</sup> to some extent, yet there is limitation of being native Egypt as mentioned above in governmental level and socially. The desire to have citizenship right for many Eritreans from the second generation serves not only to practice political rights but also as way to maintain a better life in Egypt.

“Acquiring citizenship right in Egypt means freedom of movement outside Egypt, and attending conferences and paying Egyptian fees not as foreigners. Not being worried about residency, which it makes me feel the duality of my situation in Egypt” Amna.

Amna came to Egypt at the age of six. She finished her diploma in translation; she explained that not having citizenship rights affected her freedom of movement outside

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<sup>6</sup> Native in the context of the study refer to long term residence. Egypt for many of the second generation of Eritrean is the only country they know of, and never been out of Egypt.

Egypt. She has been invited to attend conferences outside Egypt but she could not attend them because the restriction of movement inside and outside Egypt. She explained because of her status as foreigner and the difficulties in obtaining a visa to Europe, Egyptian colleagues were always asked to attend the conferences because of the easy movement cross countries.

Acquiring other nationality in Egypt is one way for some Eritreans to deal with the limitation of their membership in the Egyptian society. Khadija, who grew up in Egypt, after she graduated from Al Azhar University, lost her annual residencies and was unable to have an educational visa which is renewed every year for her and her mother. She was able to get Sudanese passport and nationality through her uncle who is Sudanese. She mentioned that this enabled her to have residency and benefit from the four agreements between Egypt and Sudan.

“I will not leave Egypt, because my belonging now has changed, it’s not to a country, it is to my religion, where I can practice my religion and learn more about it.”Soad

On the other hand, Soad who is wearing the niqab explained that what gives her a sense of belonging and home is being able to practice her religion freely and learning more about it and she can do that in Egypt easily as it will described in the next section. The rest of my interviewees mentioned that they consider themselves as Egyptian and they are socially integrated with the Egyptian community as well as with other communities.

The second generation is aspiring to obtain citizenship rights in Egypt. It is viewed as a form of legal and social capital to sustain their lives in Egypt and as part of perceiving themselves part of the host society. Many literatures have noted that different ethnic groups in Egypt are marginalized from governmental policies, national discourse and daily life (Al-Sharmani & Grabska, 2009). First generation Eritrean women are part of these marginalized groups; however, the second generation have a different experience. They were able to have access to some basic rights such as education, and that paved the way for them to enter the labour market. They consider themselves part of the mainstream society which is different from what the first generation and the new wave of Eritrean women faced and face in Egypt. However, the limited rights they enjoy as foreigners drive some of them to find migration opportunities. (Al-Sharmani, 1998).

The Egyptian government's position and policies toward long term foreigners hinder their integration.

The second generation of Eritrean women in Egypt has legitimate needs and demand by becoming permanent residents in Egypt. They are contributing actors through their participating in the labor market and participating in schools and neighborhoods (Vertovec, 1999). After the revolution and the transition period in Egypt they have little to say in the public sphere and this is because they do not have the legal status of citizenship. Their inability to participate in the political sphere as members of the Egyptian society has increased the gap between them and the host society. Furthermore, they felt more excluded from participating in the political rights.

In the following part I will discuss the process of integration through access to education and employment which facilitates their integration as it is defined in the context of Egypt by many scholars, which is degree of acceptance, participation and change. Livelihood is an important factor to measure the degree of integration.

### **Integration processes:**

In the debates on the inclusion of migrants, one view holds multiculturalism as a policy that contributes to creating ghettos and polarity. Many countries advocate integration. Integration means the absorption of migrants, as it is described in social and political theory. It is a two way process of adaptation, a process whereby the migrants and their children integrate into the dominant culture (Hassan, 2006). The integration process takes place at the level of social and economic structures and individual action regardless of state policies (Weil & Crowley, 1999). It is a multidimensional and interactive process (Paterno, Castiglioni, & Zuanna, 2009). Castles and Miller (2009) describe integration as a softer process than assimilation and it is a gradual process of mutual accommodation. But assimilation is the desired end result of the integration process. There are two characteristics for the process of integration: individuals' ties to their cultures of origin and their ties to their host societies. The second generation of Eritrean women maintains their own culture in the host country and interacts with the dominant society, which means they are integrated. Social inclusion is the concept of a "well integrated" person, which entails good education, stability in work and the ability

to maintain strong ties with the dominant society and with his/her own culture. It can be measured by the level of marginality within the host society (Munck, 2009). The process of integration depends on: 1) the history of migration of the first generation; 2) the pace of adaptation among the first and second generations; 3) the barriers that faced the second generation in the process; 4) the family and community networks that are developed to face these barriers (Fangen & Mohn, 2010).

According to Fangen & Mohn (2010) there are three fundamental dimensions to measure the process of integration: 1) long term residents' features which include education, occupational skills and wealth and knowledge of the language of the host society, in other words the sets of rights they enjoy in the host society; 2) the social environment that receives them, including the policies of the host society that facilitate the integration process; and 3) Family structure of the migrants that reflects ties to their own culture. The ideal type of integration is the full and equal participation of the long residents in the host society and it is defined as social inclusion (Hassan, 2006). In Egypt, full and equal participation of long-term residents is not applicable unless individuals have citizenship rights. Foreigners such as Eritreans from the second generation lack a long term legal status in Egypt; however, they manage to achieve various degrees of integration. Many scholars defined integration in the Egyptian context as acceptance and co-existence between the migrants and host society (Al-Sharmani, 2003; Grabska, 2005). They measure integration process by economic integration of the long term residents. In this study, the integration process is measured not only by economic integration but also by education attainment for the second generation of Eritrean women.

There are two major legal categories of non- Egyptians, refugees and foreigners. These categories are adopted by policy makers. Egypt's policies promote two concepts: temporary guest and transit migration. Both concepts are linked to the sets of rights that non- Egyptians can enjoy. Many scholars such as Al-Sharmani (2003) & Grabska (2005) noted that long term residents cannot enjoy essential rights such as access to employment, health care and education as citizens. For foreigners to have access to these rights they should have financial resources along with the facilities that are offered by the host society or developed by their own communities. The relationship between Egypt and the

country of origin of the migrants is important; it can facilitate the access to some services as Egyptian citizens through educational bilateral agreement between the two countries. Egypt offers scholarships to some African students from Eritrea and Somalia in the spirit of hospitality and solidarity. Generosity and hospitality are important elements that facilitate the integration of the Eritreans from the second generation. Long term residents from Eritrea were welcomed by the host society because they came from a conflict zone (Al-Sharmani & Grabska, 2009).

### **Education opportunities that facilitate integration processes:**

Grabska notes that marginality depends on the perception of those who define it. It is the state of being excluded. Fangen & Mohn (2010), highlight the fact that social exclusion of migrants can be viewed if this person is outside the structured areas of schooling and work and he/she likely to remain outside these areas for a period of time. Access to education is one of the aspects where marginality can be measured. And also it gives better understanding of the process of integration of the second generation. Examining access to education for the second generation is significant for two reasons: one, education in Egyptian schools has an important impact on the integration process and the acceptance of the second generation by the host society. Second, it paves the way for access to the labour market, which is also part of the integration process. The experience of the second generation indicates that they were not marginalized by the host community, and unlike the first generation, they did not marginalize themselves. Having access to education, whether the second generation depends on their own financial resources or on the opportunities available in the host community, enabled them to integrate socially in the host community.

Education in Egypt has long been connected to class and status. Higher education led to the creation of the bourgeoisie (Papanek, 1985). Upper and middle classes capitalised on their cultural assets through the educational system. In other words, families save some capital for their children and invest capital in educational opportunities in elite schools, colleges and universities which will give them easy access to labour market (Brown, 1995). Egyptians from the upper and middle class send their

children to private language schools and want their children to learn a different languages because it is perceived as social advancement with direct implications for the job market and salaries (Papanek, 1985).

As mentioned previously there is a power structure of destination that can be reached depending on class and socioeconomic background of the migrants. Hear (2004) argues that better resourced migrants have access to the desirable destination. I argue further that class and socioeconomic background determined by resources that a person can draw on in exile are important not only in shaping migrants' migration patterns but also their needs and displacement experience in the destination country. In other words, better resourced Eritreans have access to education, which facilitates their integration process in Egypt. Education is the main reason for Eritrean families to come to Egypt. Being from the upper and middle classes enables the second generation to have access and to complete their higher education, and that in turn has created better life opportunities for them. They are "well integrated" in Egyptian society.

#### Barriers in accessing education:

All the interviewees from the second generation are from middle and upper class Eritreans. As foreigners in Egypt, they had to enter private schools. In general, they were not allowed to enter public schools; however some Eritreans managed to enter primary public schools through the good relation between the Eritrean diplomatic office and the Egyptian government. None of my interviewees had access to public schools but they knew other Eritreans who managed to have access. For instance, Lamia mentioned that her cousins were enrolled in public schools. In the early 1980s, private schools were only for upper and middle class Egyptians and foreigners. Therefore, Eritreans from the second generation were placed and socialized with the upper and middle class Egyptians who wanted their children to have a better education than what was offered in public schools. The conditions of the private schools were better than the public schools, offering a better environment for teaching. The quality of the education is better than the public schools.

Three of my interviewees – Nadia, Halima, Khadija- had access to Arabic private schools nearby where they live. These private schools enabled them to socialize with non-Egyptians from Arab countries and Egyptians from the upper and middle classes. And the other four – Amna, Soad, Nagat, Lamia - were enrolled in private language schools. These schools were mainly schools for the élite of the Egyptian society. Amna and Soad faced some difficulties being enrolled in any schools because they came to Egypt older than the age of schooling. Amna’s mother tried to enroll her in many schools but she was rejected. However, one of the English schools allowed her to be enrolled. Also Soad had a similar experience; she enrolled in an English school in her neighborhood.

In general, the majority of my interviewees did not face barriers in accessing education in Egypt. They were treated as foreigners who relied on their financial resources especially at the primary school level. For those who faced difficulties in entering primary schools, it was because they had passed the age of entering school.

#### Identity construction at as early age in Egypt:

“My first year in school was negative as being different from the others, then it became positive when I accept that I’m different and knew how to deal with it” Amna

Migrants often face greater barriers if they do not speak the dominant language fluently (Fangen & Mohn, 2010). For Eritreans, being from a different country and practicing a different language in Egypt, affected some of my interviewees at the beginning. I asked my interviewees whether they had any difficulties in schools in term of coping with the other children or if they faced any different treatment than their Egyptian friends. Amna faced difficulties at school because she was not able to handle three languages at first. She was studying in English, communicating with her mother and extended family in Tigre and communicating with Egyptian friends in Arabic. Her mother could not help her in her studies, her cousins helped her especially in the first years, and then she became the one who helped other family members and friends in English. She missed the presence of her father in helping her to study. It was difficult for her mother to attend parents meeting because she was unable to communicate, she added

further. She was aware that she is not Egyptian and she is Eritrean “when my friends ask me why did I come to Egypt, I say because there is a war in Eritrea.” Having other children in the family gave her the sense of protection. She felt that she was not alone and all of them were in the same situation, which helped her to adjust rapidly in Egypt “We were group and I was not alone.” Lamia who also came to Egypt with her extended family, mentioned that when she heard that there were Eritrean families living in the neighborhood she was keen to interact with them. It made her accept easily that she is Eritrean living in Egypt. Soad described her experience in her first years. Before enrolling in school she had to take an exam at the Eritrean Liberation Front’s office to certify that she can be enrolled at the same grade as her age. She had difficulties in coping with other Egyptian children at school in first two years, “I usually sat alone, until I found a friend from Palestine and then I started to have more Egyptian friends.” Amna, Lamia and Soad had experienced the process of displacement from Eritrea, which had an impact on their interaction at first with the surrounding community. Unlike the rest of my interviewees who did not experience the displacement process of their parents like Nadia or who were born in Egypt like Nagat, they did not find any problems in interacting with their friends at school and did not face difficulties in coping with the surroundings. Nadia said that she had both Egyptian and foreign friends. She explained that being from Eritrea or different than the other children did not have any influence on her at her primary school. However, having friends from Eritrea and from different countries made it easy for her to understand that she is from a different country and living in Egypt.

“We will only be friends with you because you speak like us, but if we were speaking Sudanese Arabic we wouldn’t have become your friends” Lamia

One of the interesting points that were raised by Lamia is her interaction with Egyptian friends at schools. In order for the second generation of Eritrean women to interact with Egyptian society, they had to leave their own tradition and language when they interacted with them. They had to rely on the similarity not on the differences, and they had to not to show that they were from different country or they had a different background so they would not be treated differently.



Lamia mentioned that Egypt is a stratified society. Her ability to speak the Egyptian dialect fluently enabled her to interact with her Egyptian friends at school. Nadia, on the other hand, mentioned that “when I present myself as foreigners and from African country it means I’m from a different class, when I speak the Egyptian dialect and mention that my father works in Saudi Arabia that gives me easy interaction with Egyptian friends.” She explained that she learned what to reveal about her background and what not to talk about, because it would not be fully understood by her Egyptian friends. She gave an example of remittances. She learned not to mention to her Egyptian friend that her mother received remittances from extended family members, because they do not have the notion of the supporting system of an extended family.

For the second generation, they have the sense of knowing where they are from. This was the central part of understanding their identity, and their relation to the ‘other’ host society. They know they are Eritreans and that they have a different background from Egyptian society. However, they learned the way to interact with the society by learning the language. That was easy because they came to Egypt at an early age. Also they knew how to present themselves to the mainstream society as Eritreans from upper and middle class, who have family members in the Gulf countries. Because of their financial resources they were able to interact with upper and middle class Egyptian at private schools, which offered to them a better education than what was offered at public schools.

The interviewees of Eritrean women from the second generation, who faced difficulties in coping at school in the first years, faced involuntary disruption of multiple relocations and they were trying to regain their sense of stability through redefining and recognizing their new location. However, they were able to feel part of the host society after the adaptation process. Interacting with other Eritreans and with other children from other migrant populations paved the way for adaptation. It helped them to accept and to understand their situation in Egypt as being Eritreans who were live in Egypt.

### Educational attainment:

Of the eight women interviewed, seven completed an undergraduate degree, and two also completed a post-graduate degree. One completed high school, and then finished her diploma. Another one is studying for diploma in religious subjects to become a teacher.

Al-Azhar is one of the oldest schools of higher learning; it attracts students from all Islamic countries, mostly from Arab and African countries. Al-Azhar offers primary and secondary schools and has twelve colleges in Cairo. They are considered national and international school and the university. It receives international students, and awards annual scholarships to international students to encourage studies at the Al-Azhar schools and university. It performs an essential role in teaching religious subjects.

Three of my interviewees finished their secondary, high school and university study at Al-Azhar; all of them received different scholarships and received monthly monetary assistance. The scholarships were offered by the United Nations, for those who have refugee status like Soad or by the Supreme council and Al-Azhar for students from different countries. Some of my interviewees said that they interacted with different communities in secondary and high schools. Soad said “I found large African communities in Al-Azhar, I was happy to meet one of my relative there, I felt like having a sister with me.”

Khadija said “we didn’t know that there are scholarships offered by different entities but some non-Egyptian friends told me and I applied and was granted the scholarship till I finished my high school and then I applied again to continue at Al Azhar University.” Soad said that after the independence of Eritrea she did not have refugee status and she could not enroll at university so she went to Sheikh Al-Azhar Gad el Haq and he approved her scholarship and enrollment in Al-Azhar University. Studying at Al-Azhar institutions has many advantages mentioned by my interviewees. First, those who were enrolled at Al-Azher were able to benefit from the scholarships offered by different entities, which reduced the financial burden on their families. Second they were granted residency in Egypt, as is mentioned above in Soad’s situation. Halima explained

that she did not enter the exam in her last year at the university to have a one year renewal her residency.

Nadia, on the other hand, benefited from a different type of scholarship for foreigners. In her high school she and her cousins received monthly monetary assistance from “al wafedeen, an office for foreigners that gives monetary assistance to international students from African countries with which Egypt has bilateral educational agreements. Nadia and Lamia received scholarships and monthly monetary assistance to study at Ain Shams University, which is one of the national universities. Nadia also was one of the few who were awarded a scholarship to do her masters at the same university. Nadia mentioned that with the help of the Eritrean diplomatic office in Egypt and the Eritrean embassy she and other Eritrean youth were able to have access to Egyptian universities and were be treated like Egyptians.

Amna depended on her family’s financial resources to complete her study in a private language school and then study for her diploma in translation. She was not able to attain the desired education achievements because her high school certificate was not accepted at Egyptian universities as it was a US American certificate.

The majority of the Eritrean women from the second generation were able to have some assistance offered by the host society and by their own community. The majority of my interviewees were able to complete their undergraduate education and some were able to complete their post graduate education.

#### The outcome from educational attainment:

One of the major achievements for the second generation is that they were able to finish their education in Egypt and achieve the goal of their parents, giving meaning to their parents’ displacement. Anticipated benefits from second generation educational achievements in general are good. Amna mentioned that she did not expect to have stable work for years with her diploma degree; but she found work on her field of study. Nadia explained that her educational background gives her easy access to the labour market. Lamia, on the other hand, explained that she left Egypt because she felt that she will not

have a professional future in Egypt. She described that the Egyptian community was a closed society in the 1990s when she graduated and it was difficult to access the labour market and benefit from her education. However, she explained that if she found a good work opportunity in Egypt, she would be willing to return.

#### Challenges for being part of two communities:

Eritreans from the second generation are caught between their ethnic belonging and their belonging to the country of residence. There are some challenges faced by the second generation at as early age in the process of their adaptation in the new society. Three of my interviewees are the elder daughters in their families. Being the elder daughters in a female-headed household made them share more responsibility with their mothers at an early age. Halima said she usually took care of her younger brothers when she was in grade 5th and cooked when her mother had to travel to Saudi Arabia. She also used to organize the budget with her mother, she said “I never played in the street with other children because I had to stay at home taking care of my young brothers and sister while my mother would go to the doctor for my brother many times a week and it takes the whole day usually, my friends would sometime come and play with me at home.” Amna said that she used to take care of her brothers and sister and help her mother. She was also involved with her mother in making decisions about daily life matters. Lamia mentioned that she learned how to gather information about what facilities are available within the Eritrean community concerning education, in order to help her mother in making decisions about education opportunities for her siblings.

Another challenge that Eritreans from the second generation face is that they are treated as foreigners, which means they need to renew their residency every year by providing the documents that prove they are studying in Egypt. One of the main problems that they face after they finish their studies is how to renew their residency in Egypt. Either they register in any educational institution that grants them the paper they need for residency or they pay money for the Eritrean embassy to renew their residency, which takes between 2- 3 months or to stay in Egypt illegally. After the Egyptian revolution the Eritrean embassy could no longer renew residency for the Eritreans who live in Egypt.

Therefore, they are forced to stay in Egypt illegally. The lack of residency did not prevent some of them from continuing to work and move freely in Egypt, but the limitation of their membership in Egypt is now being questioned. And that is a significant factor that makes Eritreans think of migration.

One of the paradoxes that arose from the narrative of my interviewees is that they felt that they were not Egyptian when they deal with any governmental entities. One clear example raised by most of interviewees is when they renew their residency or when they lack residency. Amna said she stayed for many years without residency and feared being deported. However, Soad does not have residency and she moves freely without fear. Halima said that in her last year of university she did not enter the exam so she could renew her residency for one more year. Khadija described that she did not feel part of the Egyptian society when her brother could not enroll in university although he had good grades. On the other hand, Nadia said she always feels she is Egyptian.

Feeling part of the host community for my interviewees is linked to the sets of rights they can enjoy in Egypt. Having the opportunity for education made them feel that they are part of the Egyptian community and they have inspiration that the future is open to them as any other Egyptian. On the other hand, the lack of residency and the difficulties in obtaining it makes them feel unequal vis a vis that majority. Citizenship rights for Eritreans from the second generation are viewed as part of a sense of belonging and as a means for better survival.

## **Chapter Four: Processes of Integration: Employment and Marriage**

### **Work opportunities that facilitate the process of integration:**

Many governments use different policies to regulate non-citizens in their territory. Policies such as employer sanctions, legalization programmes, temporary foreign-worker admission programmes, asylum and refugee policies and measures against trafficking were developed to control peoples' movement. Castles and Miller (2009) noted that regardless of the policies used toward non-citizens they did not achieve their objectives (Castles & Miller, 2009). The reason for these policies is to prevent migrants from becoming long term residents in the host country or to prevent the creation of a new ethnic minority. Brubaker (1999) notes that no government can politically afford to maintain a completely open market for foreigners. Free and unconditional access to the labor markets is reserved for citizens; foreigners have partial and conditional access. There are terms to allow access to employment for non-citizens. In general, access to employment is open to those who are talented and who have some privileges and skills lacking in the national labour pool.

Research that focuses on second generation's economic integration emerged in the last two decade. In examining the situation of the second generation of immigrants in the OECD countries, researchers found that the native second generation of the host has higher employment chances than immigrants of the same age (Castles & Miller, 2009). Since Eritrean women from the second generation gained their education in Egypt, it is better to compare their situation with the Egyptians from the same generation. More attention has been given to the policies by the host government to regulate the long term residents in its territories. Little attention has been paid to the actual integration process of foreigners in a country like Egypt. Regardless of these policies, the perception of the second generation's integration is important and it has been ignored by scholars in examining the integration process of the second generation.

The more important question for long term foreigners in Egypt of the second generation is whether they can get decent employment. It is important to pay attention to the transition from school to work because it gives a better understanding of the structural

dimensions of integration (Crul & Vermeulen, 2003). The economic consequences of long term foreigners who access the labour market are mostly perceived by the host society as damaging the economy. It is claimed by the local population that non-citizens compete with the natives in their jobs and lower wages. Of the multiple migrants and refugee populations in Egypt, experiences of discrimination in the labour market are diverse. In poor areas and in low and unskilled employment markets, migrants are perceived as a threat to the economy. The second generation of Eritrean women, although they work in the informal sector; do not face this problem in Egypt. Their educational background and the skills they acquired enable them to navigate the labour market differently. As was mentioned previously, the impact of the policies of the host government enhances the concept of temporary guests and transit migration and hinders the process of integration (Grabska, 2006b). Under the Egyptian labour law non-Egyptians are permitted to work, however the procedure for obtaining a work permit is not easy for non-Egyptian, non-Westerners to go through from many reasons. The employer must apply for the work permit and prove that the non- Egyptian employee is not competing with the local workforce. After receiving the approval, the non- Egyptian employee has to submit to an HIV test, and produce a copy of legal documents and a reference letter. Furthermore, the employer has to pay 1000 EP every year, and the employer is subject to be questioned about the number of Egyptians as compared to non-Egyptian employees in his organization and the nature of the organization's activities and the legal status of his organization (Grabska, 2006b). The situation for both refugees and foreigners is the same in obtaining work permit. However, these policies do not have a major impact on the second generation and their access to employment. , The second generation was unable to legalize their work in Egypt for various reasons. First, some did not have residency because they finished their studies, and to apply for work permit they needed to have residency first. Second, for those who obtained refugee status they mentioned the long procedures that the employer would not care to go through. Third, the work place they worked in does not have legal status; therefore the employer cannot help in the procedures. Fourth, both the employer and the interviewees did not consider this issue at all.

The second generation of Eritrean women used their educational background to maximize their social, cultural and economic integration in Egypt. It enabled them to pursue an affordable middle class life in Egypt. They are marginalized politically and institutionally; however, they are not affected economically by this marginalization because they can access irregular employment in the informal sector, such as Amna who work as an English teacher, and Soad who teach qur'an at nursery. However, the informal sector is also accessed by middle class Egyptians. Those who have higher qualifications gain access to the informal sector and find better jobs be it the middle class Egyptian and long term residents in Egypt. Egyptian labour law for Egyptians indicates that all Egyptian must be registered and they have to pay taxes, participate in health and social insurances. Some middle class Egyptians in the informal sector avoid these procedures that regulate work; by not paying taxes they save money for services they do not benefit from.

Eritreans from the second generation consider themselves part of the Egyptian community and having more rights matters to them. At the same time, however, having limited rights did not hinder them from accessing work and being of equal position in some aspect to the host population. The reason for that is having higher education opens more opportunities in finding employment. They have assumed a more active role than their mothers and their brothers in the same household. The educational level of the second generation is high and that enables them to have more opportunities either in continuing their post graduate studies or in finding work. Unlike the women, the Eritrean men have less opportunity to find jobs that are suitable to their educational background, because the Egyptian labour market is more accessible to women than men. Many of the women become financially independent and they support their families. Four of my interviewees were able to work in Egypt and they have different work experience in Egypt. None of them mentioned that they found obstacles obtaining work as non-Egyptians. Furthermore, being a non- Egyptian did not have a negative impact in their employment. They know their limitation and opportunities in Egypt. The lack of practicing their right - in legalizing their work in Egypt- did not prevent them from acquiring jobs that suit their qualifications. They are aware of the difficulties in having



work permits but that did not put them in a disadvantage positions or make them subject to exploitation.

Access to employment:

Most of my interviewees mentioned that being a non-Egyptian but speaking Egyptian Arabic, having computer and English language skills was advantages. Five of my interviewees have work experiences in different fields. Only Halima did not have work experience for two reasons: one, she is wearing the niqab, which makes it difficult to access the labour market and she has more responsibility as an elder daughter at home in helping her mother. Nagat did not have work experience but is training in the summer to be an English teacher. For those who entered the labour market and got paid, it was after they finished their undergraduate studies. Accessing employment was a decision they made to help in the financial burden at home, to cover their expenses and to increase their work experience.

Amna studied in a language school which opened the way for her to find good jobs in various places. She explained that speaking fluent English was an advantage and helps her in her career because she mainly works with Westerners. Nagat will graduate this year, and will search for work in her field as her Egyptian friends will do. When I asked her if her nationality will affect her in finding work, she said she never thought about it and she does not think she will encounter any problems that her Egyptian friend will not. In other words, she will face the same challenges her Egyptian friends will face and she has an advantage that she speaks English.

Nadia mentioned that after she graduated, she found work in many places and she changed her field many times. She did not encounter any problem in finding work because she is non-Egyptian. She describes “in all the jobs I acquire, my employers protected me they told me if any officer came from the social services to ask about whether I have a work permit, I just say I’m doing training.” She also explained that she shares this experience with her Egyptian colleagues at work, they do not have social insurance and they do not want to their salaries to be reduced, therefore they say they are

also doing training at the work place. Nadia never considered that being non-Egyptian would prevent her from finding a suitable job.

Before leaving Egypt, Lamia worked as an English teacher with refugees and also for a period of time at one of the private orphanages. However, she mentioned she would have better access to the Egyptian labour market if she had Egyptian citizenship. After she graduated from Al-Azhar University in Psychology, Khadija took a one year diploma at Ain Shams University, and then trained in psychology in an Egyptian public school. She had the opportunity to take one-year courses related to her field at the same university. She was allowed by the administration to pay the same fees as an Egyptian would. Then she found work with disabled children through the university. Her employer knew that she was non-Egyptian but because of her qualification she was able to work. She said “being non- Egyptian did not affect me, on the contrary they trusted me more and treated me well, so it was advantage to be non- Egyptian speaking Egyptian Arabic ”

Soad as well has long work experience and she has changed her work field many times. She graduated from Al-Azhar University. In her last year she found work in a science lab, and then she worked in a trade company. She changed her career and worked with refugees at St. Andrews Church, following that for several years in a nursery. Finally, after a degree in Islamic studies, she is now teaching in that field. She mentioned “I never felt like threatened or I’m a foreigner, I move freely inside the country like an Egyptian even if I don’t have residency.”

#### Type of employment:

As mentioned before, five of my interviewees acquired jobs in many different fields. The decision of some of my interviewees to change their field of work was because they found better job opportunities. For instance, Soad stopped working in a lab, because she found better work in a private English school. All five interviewees - Nadia, Lamia, Amna, Khadija and Soad- at some point in their career worked in the field of education. Four of my interviewees Nadia, Lamia, Amna and Soad started their career as English teachers in the private sector. Lamia graduated from the Faculty of Art, English Literature, for Amna, who had diploma in translation, working as an English teacher is

related to her field of education. Nadia graduated from the Faculty of Commerce, and worked as an assistant manager for six years. As mentioned previously, Khadija worked as a Psychologist in the Egyptian school system.

None of my interviewees described their work environment as hostile; they did not face discrimination based on their color or country of origin. However, three of my interviewees who worked as English teachers, said their work environment was mainly based on communicating with Westerners, and mentioned that they enhanced their language and computer skills from their work.

In examining the livelihoods of the second generation of Eritrean women in Egypt in term of the degree of integration, we find that the second generation co-exist and share the same resources as the Egyptian community. There is a high degree of acceptance, participation and change from both, the host community and the second generation. The host community does not deny them access to education and employment. They were offered more rights than are available to other refugees. However, they are not securing their livelihood as aliens but as part of the host community. One of the important parts of the process of integration is for a person to be socially integrated into the dominant population. All of my interviewees mentioned that they are socially integrated. They feel part of the host society, and they consider themselves as members of the host society.

#### Job stability and security:

Those who worked as English teachers in the informal sector have a sense of stability and security. The reason behind this sense is that the work environment includes Egyptians and non-Egyptians in the same place. For instance, Nadia's first work place was comprised of many Algerians who worked as French teachers and Egyptians as well; the owner of the nursery was from Switzerland. Amna also works with Sudanese and Europeans, and her long standing employment in the same position gives her a sense of stability. Lamia, on the other hand, before she left Egypt worked primarily with Westerners. It was a stable job but it did not fulfill her ambitions. She did not feel any progress and could not find a better job. She attributed this to being non Egyptian and at the time she graduated in 1994 it was not common for non Egyptians entering the labour

market. Soad, who wears the niqab, is working s full time teacher as a Qur'an teacher in a nursery. She has a sense of security and stability with her Egyptian employer. Khadija, who worked as a psychologist for a period of time, was not working at the time of the interview because she got married and was expecting to move to the UK with her husband.

In general, most of the interviewees have a sense of stability and security. Changing from one job to another one is attributed to their desire for a better jobs and career advancement. Also, making the decision to stay at home is attributed to personal choice not because of difficulties they face in the job environment.

#### Second generation employment status compared with Egyptians from the same generation and educational background:

Most of my interviewees expressed that they are in better employment positions than their Egyptian peers with the same educational background. Only Amna stated that because she did not have a university degree, her friends who were with her at school are in a better job. However, she considers herself lucky because she could achieve a good career with her educational background. On the other hand, Soad, Khadija, Nadia and Lamia expressed that they are satisfied with the work experiences and they noted that they have good work experiences compared with their friends from school.

#### Contribution to family finances:

Transnational activities are an integral part of the lives of my interviewees' lives. All of my interviewees from the second generation received remittances from other family members to sustain their lives in Egypt. Most of my interviewees still live with their mothers. Those who are married are supported financially by their husbands. The rest have jobs to cover their expenses and contribute to enhancing their financial situation. Some of my interviewees mentioned that although they have stable jobs in Egypt that help in the familial financial situation, their salaries are not enough to sustain their lives in Egypt and they need extra assistance from their family members who live

aboard. This situation, however, does not significantly differ from their Egyptian counterparts in similar work situations.

### **Gender specifics in the process of integration:**

It is important to examine the gender specific possibilities of integration. Eritrean men and women face different opportunities and experiences that affect their lives in Egypt. The OECD study showed that women perform better than men in education, which contradicts the assumption that young immigrant women tend to have less education than their males counterparts. That indicates that having an education in a foreign country has an impact on second generation women's emancipation. This study shows that both Eritrean men and women have different experiences in education and access to the labour market in Egypt. Eritrean women from the second generation perform relatively well in school and have positive experiences in accessing the labour market, unlike the Eritrean men from the second generation, who face some difficulties in having better opportunities in education attainment. One of the main reasons for that is, Eritrean women tend to choose an accessible field of study unlike some Eritrean men who choose to enter top field of studies at Egyptian universities. There are many challenges faced by Eritrean men in entering these universities in Egypt, first, these universities have limited seats for foreigners, not to mention limited scholarships for Eritreans. Second, Eritrean men face high competition to enter these universities. Migration opportunities within the Eritrean household from the second generation tend to favor men over women. Hence, Eritrean women focus in finishing their university education in Egypt by choosing accessible fields of study.

In some cases Eritrean men face discrimination based on their nationality and accessing decent jobs that meet their qualifications. However, the situation of Eritrean men from the second generation can be compared with their native counter parts in the host country. One of the main challenges faced by Eritrean men from the second generation is that they could not achieve access to the desired university in Egypt. Their educational ambitions reflect believes that attending top universities is necessary to enter labour market easily and achieving financial stability for them and their families as bread

winner. There is no major distinction between men and women from the second generation in accessing Egyptian schools. However, some Eritrean men faced discrimination at schools in accessing some school activities as their Egyptian comrades. Lamia mentioned that her younger brother Mohamed was enrolled in a language school. When he was in secondary school he was excluded from football the team because he was not Egyptian. Mohamed was talented in playing football and he was initially part of the school football team. However, when his football teacher learned that Mohamed was not Egyptian, he was excluded from the football team where he was supposed to participate in school's football competitions. Lamia said that since then Mohamed knew that he did not have equal opportunities as his fellow Egyptians. Mohamed also faced difficulties in accessing Egyptian universities. He desired to study English Commerce at Ain Shams University, but he had to pay the tuition because the scholarship that was offered was only for Arabic commerce.

Khadija narrated her brother's experience. Ali got high grades in high school, which enabled him to be enrolled at the Faculty of Engineering; this university had limited sets for foreigners. Ali did not find a scholarship to access the desired education and so he stayed at home for two years. That made him think of migration, Khadija said that "he was frustrated because he got the grades but he could not enter the university he wanted. All his friends were able to study but he could not. Then he was obsessed with migration. He could not stand being in Egypt." His mother Stoum convinced his father that it was better for him to migrate where he would have a better future. She said "it's not easy that my sons migrate, but this is in their best interest, so they will help us in future but if they stayed in Egypt without finishing their education or acquire a job I will lose them."

Some of the Eritrean men from the second generation did not perform well at high school, which in turn affected their choice of the undergraduate studies. Both Halema and Naida mentioned that their brothers did not get the grades they needed to enter Egyptian universities. Naida's brother went to study computer science in India. Studying in India is a viable solution for many Eritreans men who can afford it, if they fail to enter Egyptian

universities. Halema's two brothers could not afford it; therefore, they waited for migration opportunities to Europe and North America, where they are now.

“Although he had good education and good English but he couldn't find a job that enable him to support us and Egypt didn't offer him a good future and this is the situation of many Eritrean youth, they don't have a professional future in Egypt” Nadia.

The level of education and the skills they acquire determine the position of the person in the labour market. The economic situation in Egypt means that even if an individual has skills and education, he might face difficulties in accessing the labour market. In the long run, for Eritrean men, it was difficult to find decent jobs in Egypt. Nadia mentioned that her brother returned from India and tried to find a job, it took him a while to find a job in his field. She explained that when he found a job in a computer Maintenance Company from 10am till midnight for 300EP, he worked hard, gained practical experience and took some computer courses as well. He tried to find a better job in Egypt but he failed and now he is working in the Gulf as an IT coordinator with a better salary and less working hours.

The Eritrean men in Egypt faced a different education experience than the women. The challenges for the Eritreans men in Egypt were different, and they did not have equal opportunity with Egyptians to study at universities because some of the Eritrean men could get the grades that enabled them to enter these universities. For those who could obtain university degree, they did not have equal access to employment and leading a dignified life. The limited education opportunities to enter universities for the men in Egypt either because they did not get the grades that enable them to be enrolled in the desired universities or because the limited sets at these universities for foreigners, made them think of migration. The choice of who migrates within Eritrean families in Egypt depends on the perception that men are the breadwinners. Therefore, migration opportunities within the household favor the male to migrate than female. Also many of the Eritrean men from the second generation did not feel as part of the Egyptian community because of the challenges they face in both accessing to education and employment.

### **Transnational marriages and transnational lives:**

Beyond education and employment, marriage constitutes the third significant element in the study of integration processes. Two issues concerning marriage dominated in my fieldwork conversations: first, the decline of marriage opportunities for Eritrean women who grew up in Egypt; second, the rejection by the second generation of the transnational lives that their parents have lived.

When forced displacement occurs, family units are deeply affected. Thirty years of war have affected the Eritrean population inside and outside Eritrea. As mentioned before, Eritrea was going through social transformations that affected the social structure in Eritrea. Due to the strong ties within Eritrean society the Eritrean families who were displaced during the war were affected by these changes. The transformation in the social structure for the Eritrean diasporas took the form of a transnational social field that links together the country of origin, the country of settlement and shattered extended families across many countries.

Castles & Miller (2009) note that the increased ease of movement in the age of migration leads to more movement for marriage. Transnational ties take many forms, and one of the important forms is marriage. Most of the second generation immigrants spent their lives in the destination country and hence they have more social ties to it. If the country of origin of the second generation is in long term conflict, it is less likely that this generation has ties or visits the country of origin. For example, StraBurger (2004) noted that second generation Turks in Germany have more ties to the host community and their transnational ties to family, friends and kin in the country of origin have declined.

One of the important forms of transnational social spaces is marriage. Transnational marriages are considered an advantage to both partners from the same ethnic group, because they achieve kinship obligation and maintain family ties. Marriage patterns in Eritrea are affected by the changes in family structure. This can be observed in the second generation of the displaced population. In Eritrea, marriage patterns were that women did not have a choice in selecting their partner; the decision was taken by her



male parent and in some tribes the marriage partner had to be from the same ethnic group.

However, there were changes among the second generation of Eritrean women who grew up in Egypt. It is no longer the case that they have to marry someone from the same tribe or the same family and class. Families became more flexible in accepting suitable partners for their daughters. These changes were made gradually according to the situation and life circumstances in exile. For instance, when the first generation was displaced, it was not common for Eritrean women to marry someone who was not Eritrean. In some tribes like Tigre it was not common for women to marry someone not from the same ethnicity. Scattered families make it difficult for this type of marriage to happen, which has consequences for the marriage opportunities for women outside Eritrea. The decrease of marriage opportunities for Eritrean women, along with widespread changes in the structure inside and outside of Eritrea affected the views of Eritrean families. It is no longer necessary for partners to be from the same ethnicity. Also, in more recent times the partner no longer necessarily needs to be Eritrean, though that remains the preferable option marriage opportunities are one of the interesting points raised by many of the interviewees. Marriages are being delayed beyond the usual age of marriage. Women who grew up in Egypt are perceived by Eritreans who live abroad to be independent. Therefore, they receive less marriage opportunities than Eritrean women who live in the neighboring countries and Eritrea. Khadija said that they are perceived as more educated and modernized than Eritrean women who are in other places such as Eritrea, the Gulf and Sudan. Furthermore, she asked her husband and other Eritreans about the reason that most of the Eritrean men do not propose to Eritrean women who grow up in Egypt. The answer was that they have a good education. Another reason is that they know their rights as women, which will give men a hard time in competing with them. She argues that women's education should be considered as advantage.

Nadia mentioned that “Many Eritrean girls in Egypt do not get marriage opportunities because they are educated and they work in Egypt and that makes Eritrean males feel threatened because they lived in an “open society” unlike those who lived in the Sudan and the Gulf countries.” Another reason is that they worry about the excessive

marriage demand from Eritrean women who grew up in Egypt. She added, “but they don’t know that life in Egypt teaches us to be practical and less dependent.”

On the other hand, Lamia who now lives in the USA, explained Eritrean men who live in Europe and North America search for younger Eritrean wives who live in the Gulf, Sudan, or Eritrea. Most of these men do not work in their field of education. Others, who only have a high school education from Europe and North America, do not have good, stable jobs, and they search for educated wives because it is considered advancement. However, in most cases it is considered as a threat because it affects the power dynamics between the partners.

Beck- Gernsheim (2007) explains that men believe that marrying someone from the same ethnic group and who lives in the country of origin shifts the power relation in their favor. That explains why Eritrean women who grew up in Egypt receive less marriage opportunities than their counterparts in neighboring countries. If Eritrean women from the second generation are perceived as being independent and knowing their rights because they are educated, this power relation is shifted in their favor this raises concerns for the marriage partner who lives in Europe and North America. They desire more traditional women from the country of origin. In addition, Eritrean men assume that educated women will have excessive marriage demands.

In the following part, I will give ethnographic examples of the effects of transnational families on shaping the decision of the second generation in choosing their spouses.

For the Eritrean women from the second generation, they have both ties to the host communities and their transnational ties. Transnational ties to family, friends and kin are an integral part of their lives and better life opportunities in Egypt. Transnational marriages with Eritrean partners – living in/ outside Eritrea – are an indicator of stronger ties to transnational lives. Yet the transnational lives that the parents of the second generation lived, which were an important tool for their survival, are now being rejected by the second generation. The second generation is expressing their unwillingness to live transnational marriages like their mothers. As mentioned before, it is difficult for Eritrean

men to generate an income in Egypt. Therefore, migration to a third country where they can pursue their education or find suitable jobs is significant. For those who did not find migration opportunities, their financial situation in Egypt hinders them from forming families. Also Eritrean women from the second generation perform well in education which in turn gives them better chances to enter the labour market or to continue their post graduate studies in Egypt. The husbands of women from the second generation mainly live outside Egypt.

Khadija is married to an Eritrean who lives in the UK. She was rejected twice by the UK embassy to join her husband. She explained that she waited for two years to process her marriages papers before the wedding party and then she decided to do the wedding party and then apply again so she can relocate with her husband. She said that if her paper is rejected again, her husband will move to Egypt and try to establish work in Egypt since he has UK citizenship. She mentioned “I will not live my parents’ life and we live in separate countries for years and he sees me once or twice a year, either I go with him to UK or he comes to live with me in Egypt” she told her husband “after we get married you have one visit to Egypt, either you come to take me with you or you stay with me.”

Nadia is married and she explained how she negotiated with her husband about where they will live. Her husband suggested that Nadia stay with her family until he can find her a suitable place where she can live. She refused to live through a transnational marriage as her mother did and she will move with him. She narrated that she saw half of her female family members who lived for years waiting to join their husbands and after that they either end up separated or the husband dies. She said,

“our mothers were brave, they lived as mothers not as wives/ women, they sacrificed their lives as women to be just mothers and that was a goal in itself to them, I don’t think I can give this sacrifice for my children but at the same time we don’t know what kind of choices we have to make for our children.” She also mentioned that her mother and brothers do not want her to live away from her husband. Her mother said “you don’t have to make this choice now, for me life forced me to take this decision.”

Amna mentioned that she received a proposal from an Eritrean. She said that she is hesitant to approve until she knows where they will live. She said “I will not live my mother’s life again; I will not give my approval until I know where we will live and that we will have stable life together.” She added “when my brothers left, I felt that the same tragedy is happening again that my father lived in another place and we don’t see him often,” therefore, she does not want to live separated from the one she is going to marry.

Traditional assimilation theory indicates that long-term migrants generally tend to leave their cultural practices, language and the second generation ultimately loses their distinctiveness and become part from the dominant society. Eritrean women in this sample are better integrated in the Egyptian society but also they have their transnational ties. Their experience with transnational lives shaped their decision in choosing their partners. The most important thing to them is to live in the same country with their partners and they want a more romantic life. Being part of transnational activities with their family members who live in different countries is important and it will continue for long time.

In general, the experience of transnational families shaped the decisions of the second generation. They reject living in different countries from their spouses; they are establishing this as a condition when they choose their spouses.

## **Chapter Five: The Long Waiting Room: The New Wave of Eritrean Women in Egypt**

### **Introduction:**

This chapter will focus on the Eritrean women who came to Egypt after the year 2000. It will focus on three groups of Eritrean women: first, married women with children who came from Sudan or the Gulf countries; second, single women who came from the Gulf countries for education; and third, young women who ran away from military serves in Eritrea. All the three groups of these women came from middle class Eritrean families; the primary goal for their presence in Egypt is migration. I will show the complexity of their situation in Egypt and the driving forces behind their migration. I will discuss the power dynamics between partners in the migration decision-making. I will explain how some of the Eritrean families experience refugeeness in Egypt, which is reflected in their socio-economic status and the decreasing of financial resources, which seriously affects their life options and constrained their choices and decisions in Egypt.

Even though Eritrea is country with a multiplicity of ethnicities and religious beliefs, research rarely focuses on these diversities. Historically, Eritrea was socially organized around seven main tribes, eventually nine tribes. With the beginning of Eritrean nationalism in the 1940s, driven by social actors from the middle class in areas dominated by the Italian and later British colonial elite Makki (2011) notes that the collective identity of Eritrean societies was made and remade through historical and political factors in the last sixty decades. For instance, the Italian colonization encouraged the notion of tribal or ethnic authenticity, and divided Eritrean societies through ethnolinguistic categories. During the British administration, religion was more significant in structuring social policies. Yet, as Makki's work suggests these policies had limited impact in transforming the complex and dynamic social field. Yet, two of the major changes with a long term transformative impact in the tribal system under the

British administration was (a) the reorganization of society according to genealogical descent and (b) the encouragement of small families to merge in order to be receive independent 'tribal status'. Most significant for the shaping of post-colonial modern Eritrean identity is the EPLF's focus on state building and the forging of a sense of "Eritreanness" thereby breaking the ability of tribal and kinship affiliations to play a political role as it did ,for example, in the constitution of the neighboring Somali state. (Kibreab, 2009)

This weakening of ethnic and tribal affiliations also defined the social field among Eritrean communities in Egypt for a variety of discrepant reasons. As noted in the third chapter, tribal affiliation was important to the first generation of Eritrean women as a form of personal identity and status, however, it did not form the basis of their interaction with other Eritrean communities in Egypt. All Eritreans from the first generation irrespective of tribal affiliation socialized together, among others, due to the small community of Eritreans in Egypt and the challenges posed by exile to these predominantly female-headed households. One of the striking changes in the post-2000 new wave of Eritrean migration to Egypt is the importance assigned to tribal and ethnic affiliations in the everyday life of the community. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth processes of "national" identity constructions in long term-exilic populations, some reflections are nonetheless significant for the subject under study. Three reasons possibly account for the renewed attention given to tribal affiliation among the new wave in Egypt. First, the number of Eritrean families has been increasingly steadily. Second, new wave migrants are not arriving in Egypt directly from Eritrea, but have been living in other host countries for over a decade such as in the Gulf. Different host communities, and their policies of managing migrants/refugees, leave their imprint on migrant/ refugee communities and their sense of self. Third, the new wave is socially excluded and marginalized in Egypt in ways in which the first and second generation were not.

Social exclusion and marginalization refers to being marginalized legally from accessing rights and services in the host country; being socially discriminated against by the main stream society which in turn leads to the marginalization of the self. While both

the first and the new wave of Eritreans were/are marginalized, they were/are so for different reasons and with very different effects. The availability of financial resources meant that social exclusion for the first generation women was experienced very differently than it is for the new wave. For instance, the first generation excluded themselves socially from the host society because they were excluded from cultural capital, Egyptian sociality, respect, fulfillment and understanding. Yet, they did not have challenges accessing services because they can afford paying for these services. The first generation replaced the marginalization they experienced within the host society by interacting more within the Eritrean communities regardless of their tribal affiliation. This was possible due to the small number of Eritrean, predominantly female-headed, families in Egypt. They socialized together and shared information that concerned their lives in Egypt. Furthermore, they maintained close relations with the Eritrean diplomatic office that provided them with assistance.

The new wave of Eritrean women in Egypt are labeled refugees, asylum seekers or transit migrants. Those who applied for refugee status face social exclusion in term of being marginalized legally because they are in the process of becoming refugees. Refugees in Egypt are treated as a threat to the host society and they are not welcome. The new wave is diverse in that some have access to services if they can afford them and subject to the inflow of remittances, some manage to be accepted as refugees which entitles them to benefits and limited services provided by UNHCR. The new wave comes from a middle class stable life in their previous host countries. The decision to move to Egypt with limited resources has rendered their reproduction of a middle class lifestyle precarious at best, rendering tribal and ethnic networks essential for their economic and social well-being. For instance, today new wave Eritreans from the Saho tribe socialize and cluster in the Ain Shams neighborhood in Cairo. This transformation in patterns of dwelling and sociality around tribal and ethnic networks, is, among others, a response to the social exclusion and marginality they experience in the Egypt. Furthermore, unlike earlier generations, the new wave has limited connections with the Eritrean embassy in Egypt.

In the last two decades the importance of the family as opposed to individual migrants, and the gendered dynamics within, has received much attention in migration studies (Zlotnik, 1995). The family unit has increasingly been understood as essential in understanding how decisions are made regarding migration of individuals, the flow of remittances, and the reproductions of transnational community bonds (Alarcon, 2012). The transnational reproduction of family life (and Eritrianness) is an important site to study cultural and social change over the past thirty years. Gender roles within Eritrean families have been substantially altered due to their transnationalization. The structure of the family as one unit was important for the first generation of exilic Eritrean parents, at the same time the permanent separation of families in two host locations, and the emergence of female-headed households, significantly altered the roles and expectations of men and women within the family. The primary focus of the parents of the first generation in the post-1961 period was educational opportunities for their children. In this generation of exiles coming directly from Eritrea, divorce, was not socially accepted. Many of the first generation of Eritrean families, who resettled within the region, had the hope that the war would end and they would return to the Eritrea, and the social norms and forms that they had left behind. Following the independence of Eritrea in 1991, this generation still hoped that they would be part of the country's development process.

The new wave has no such expectations. Drawing on their experience of long term displacement in multiple host contexts, their primary desire is to find stability and legal security for their children in a transnational existence. Migration to Europe or North America constitutes the focus of "success" for the new wave. Notions of family have significantly changed within this group over the period of exile. The breakdown of the nuclear family due to the stress of managing marriages and families across different countries has increasingly made divorce an acceptable option among the new wave. With the decreasing of ties to Eritrea, and the loss of a vision of eventual return, marriage of Eritrean women to non-Eritreans has become acceptable. Among the new wave in Egypt the number Eritrean families who desire to migrate has increased. According to UNHCR, the number of Eritrean refugee and asylum seekers in Egypt rose to 1987 in 2012 (UNHCR, 2012).



To shed further light on some of these complexities and changes in the Eritrean community in Cairo, the remainder of this chapter draws on interviews with two Eritrean women: Hanna and Alia. Alia is a young woman who came to Egypt in 2004 to avoid military service in Eritrea. Given that there are only two ways to avoid military service for young women -- early marriage or withdrawal from educational and employment opportunities -- Alia opted to leave under difficult circumstances. For Alia Egypt is a transit zone, she is currently waiting for opportunities for onward migration.

Hanna, in contrast, came to Egypt in the late 1970s and is considered an Eritrean leader. She is a single mother of one daughter and is heavily involved with all Eritrean communities in Egypt. Many newly arriving Eritreans contact Hanna and seek her help in issues related to UNHCR, and different services available in Egypt. For instance, she offers shelter to Eritrean women who do not have a place to go and raises funds within the Eritrean communities for Eritrean youth who come directly from Eritrea and do not have any source of income or for those who need urgent medical services. Hanna also teaches handcrafts to Eritrean, and also Sudanese and Iraqi, refugee women. With her strong connections to Eritrean communities over the past thirty years she provides help for many destitute Eritreans in Egypt. She works for the rights of Eritreans, especially women, and is a vocal advocate against stereotypes of Eritrean and other refugee communities in Egypt.

Hanna divides the post-2000 new wave into three groups, the largest being Eritrean families who were living in Sudan or Saudi Arabia; the second group are students who came from different neighboring countries to study at Egyptian universities; and the third group are Eritreans who escaped Eritrea due to the deteriorating situation or who are in refugee camps in Sudan, and come to Egypt to find better opportunities for migration.

## Migration and marital relations

### The migration-gender nexus

The migration-gender nexus includes many elements: ways in which women can be a resource for family well-being, potential empowerment for women migrants, and the change in gender relations. Recently, some scholars started to focus on the process of migration decision making within the household, and how it shapes the opportunities and chances available for women (Ghosh, 2009; Silvey, 2006; Willis & Yeoh, 2000). There are many reasons for female migration. But it is problematic to categorize the motivation as forced or voluntary, because the issue of coercion and choice is always contingent. Migratory movement of women have diverse causes and impacts, such as desire for a better life, escaping hardship and poverty, political persecution, social or family pressures (Jolly, Reeves, & BRIDGE, 2005). Gender roles, relations and inequalities influence the decision of who migrates and why. The migration process in turn raises the question of the changes in gender roles and potential for women's empowerment. Bastia & Busse (2011) argue that transformations in gender roles in migratory households can lead to an increase or decrease of women's decision making powers depending on a wide variety of factors and situations (Busse, 2011). While most of the literature links household changes to new forms of women's employment, in the past limited work has focused on migratory women that do not join the labour market (migratory housewives) and/or the dynamics of middle class women migrants. The predominant analytic categories thus for a long time remained (a) women that are left behind (b) women that migrate to join their spouses and (c) more recently , women that migrate for work and send remittances (Jolly, Reeves and BRIDGE 2005; Charsley, et al. 2012). With the emergence of transnationalism as an academic analytic category the gender and migration nexus was able to expand the questions and frameworks in which to study global mobility. Connecting gender and family to transnational frameworks has allowed more fuller understanding of the transformation and fragmentation that shapes the structure of the family, and the changing roles of individual members, as result of migration (Alarcon, 2012).

As I have argued so far, transnational families are a key framework through which to understand the predominantly female headed Eritrean households in Egypt across generations. New wave Eritrean women especially leave their first country of residency and move to a transit country to migrate to a third country. Due to the restrictive migration policies of countries of the desired destination, they end up living for years in transit countries such as Egypt. There are many reasons for married Eritrean women from the new wave to move to Egypt, including factors related to the sending countries and receiving country. Egypt is well known as a transit country in which individuals can find migration opportunities by applying for refugee status which is considered one of the important gateways for migration, especially for women with children, and if UNHCR does not offer resettlement opportunities, those who apply will have legal status in Egypt. Also, better opportunities exist for migration through illegal channels, or being sponsored by family members who live in Canada. There are push factors in sending countries. In Saudi Arabia the kafalla system for foreigners and the ill treatment by Saudi employers raises a sense of insecurity for Eritrean men that they may lose their jobs at anytime. Access to education and health services is relatively expensive and difficult. Due to this situation many Eritrean husbands send their family members to Egypt so that they can potentially migrate to a third country. Political insecurity in the Sudan, the weak economy and the quality of educational and health services, likewise pushes families to Egypt.

#### Migration decision making:

Fisher et al. (1997) explains that the dynamics of migration decision making is often based on individual expectations about the advantages and disadvantages of migration. The determinant of migration decision making, however, is not the same for male and female migrants (Jong, 2000). De Jong (2000) identifies many areas that influence migration decision making: expectations, perceived family migration norms, change in gender roles, and migrants' networks. A household's priorities influences women's migration decision making. Migration decision making of the new wave of married Eritrean women shows the dynamics of this decision process and the way it changes in the process of migration. Eritrean women from this group start their journey

as migrants and in the migratory process were labeled as refugees, asylum seekers and transit migrants. They are excluded from one category and included into another category because they are middle class Eritreans and have the financial resources that enable them to make the decision to migrate. However, putting these women into any of these categories does not reflect their situation and misses the dynamics of the migration process.

The general profile of new wave Eritrean women migrants are married women with school-age children. Most of these women did not complete their high school degrees. Some of these women come from the Gulf countries to Egypt, often because their husbands took the decision of their relocation despite their own reluctance to move. Women coming from Sudan generally are the ones that make the decision to relocate to Egypt. In all cases, both groups of married women insist on finding migration opportunities, particularly when the migration decision has negative implications on the family unit. Upon arrival in Egypt, they play central roles in managing their families from securing legal protection for their children to finding migration opportunities. In this sense, it is the Eritrean migrant women that shape, influence and are an integral part of the transnational system. This is not to say that they do not navigate vulnerabilities, especially those dependent on remittances from their male spouses. Hanna, the community leader, describes the decision making processes to migrate, and the webs of vulnerability that new wave women continually navigate reflective of the changing structure and culture of the “new” Eritrean transnational family. With the emergence of divorce as an acceptable option, new wave women are often encouraged or pushed to migrate to Egypt to secure the future of their children, to find a route to a third country, where they could acquire a nationality and have access to quality education and health services. At the same time, this gives their husbands the opportunity to start new families. Hanna narrated a story of one of the married Eritrean women from the new wave who came from Saudi Arabia, she said “her husband convinced her to move to Egypt, then he married another woman and now she is forced to find a quick migration opportunity as he is sending her less money which barely can cover her and her children’s expenses and she cannot return to live with him.” Hanna mentioned another case of a woman who

came from the Sudan leaving her 14 year old daughter behind. Her husband used this opportunity to force their young daughter to marry a significantly older man in the Sudan. As Hanna puts it, men's perceptions of migration have changed. Migration is the solution to have less responsibilities and family burden. She said "In the past, men were searching for safety and better education opportunities for their children but now they are searching for migration to run away from their responsibilities." One of the main findings of this study is that among the new wave of married Eritrean women, women are the ones who migrate and leave their spouses behind. Those who came from the Sudan mostly have Sudanese citizenship. Hanna mentioned that they had a stable life in Sudan and their spouses ran their own business. Women chose to move to Egypt either with their children, or leave their children behind until they find migration opportunities. Egypt is a transit country for these women until they find migration opportunities. Hanna mentioned that these women "see future and advancement in the West." One way to migrate through Egypt is by applying for refugee status. Therefore, the women abandon their Sudanese citizenship to become refugees in Egypt. According to Hanna, the new wave is characterized by men "sending their families to unknown places without making sure that the country is safe and suitable for single woman with children to live in. They only think that migration will solve their entire problems." Irrespective of how migration decisions are negotiated within households in the Gulf or in the Sudan, new wave middle class Eritrean women and their children in their quest to get to Europe or North America are unable and unwilling to various degrees to establish themselves in Egypt and struggle to maintain middle class life styles in the protracted transit space they find themselves in.

#### Change in gender roles and gender relations:

Danielson (2012) describes the wide-reaching transnational social networks that create the cycles of hope for resettlement associated with the instability in the countries of origin or the first country of asylum. Resettlement countries accept a limited numbers of refugees from Cairo (Kagan, 2011). While waiting for migration opportunities, women are unable to effectively plan their lives due to the pressures they face either from their spouses or from the economic hardship they face in Egypt. Furthermore, those who apply

for refugee status indicate that they would have better chances to be accepted if they were single mothers with children.

The migration decisions have many implications for transnational marriages and marital relations. The new location increases Eritrean women's autonomy and power in decision making. Hanna describes that the role of the women has changed from being housewives to being responsible for everything concerning livelihood in Egypt.

The first implication of transnational marriage is that it has an impact on the family unit. Many studies indicate that family reunification is one of the reasons for women to migrate. The case of Eritrean women from the new wave is different. They migrate with their children and they leave their spouses behind. When they resettle in a third country either they decide to bring their husband or they end up divorced. Hanna mentioned that the level of divorced Eritrean women in Egypt has increased in recent years. It can be traced to many reasons: first, the split up of the family in many countries for a long time is one reason for divorce; because finding migration opportunities in recent years is protracted, women find themselves trapped in Egypt while their spouses keep on sending remittances. Many men choose to marry another woman when their wives move to Egypt. Hence they add more financial responsibilities and their limited financial resources are divided between two houses. This situation in turn drives Eritrean women to become more determined to find migration opportunities due to their failing marriages.

Transnational circumstances have long term social and economic consequences, especially on the education and the health of the children (Alarcon, 2012). Many Eritrean women do not enroll their children in school immediately after they come to Egypt; they are under the assumption that migration process will not take a long time. Therefore, many children stay at home for a year or two without education. Hanna explained that the main priority for these women is migration and that affects their children negatively in terms of being enrolled in schools. Eritrean children experience de-stabilized lives in Egypt, in particular those who come from Sudan because they leave their fathers and their schools. One of the important developments in the roles of new wave Eritrean

married women is that they become more active in the transnational system, if for nothing else but as a tool for survival. Remittances are one aspect of the transnational system and play an important role in their lives. On the other hand, remittances are a pressure tool from their spouses to force their wives to find migration opportunities. Hanna explained that transnational marriages create tensions between spouses, and women experience vulnerability when their husbands send them remittance irregularly. Many women avoid the disadvantage of their situation by expanding their transnational network activities to depend on many family members and decrease their dependency on their husbands. Many of the married Eritrean women have applied for refugee status. Although the UNHCR offers limited services for refugees, it offers legal status in Egypt and some monetary assistance for single mothers with children, which decreases the women's dependency on their husbands.

#### Community building and tribal affiliation:

Many scholars noted the importance of communities in providing assistance to its members. For instance, Grabaska (2005) explained community assistance as one of the survival strategies for Sudanese refugees. Strong connections within the different Sudanese communities provides informal assistance such as sharing the same household, dividing duties and pooling resources to meet their needs. Also Al- Sharmani (2003) emphasizes the significance of community in constructing and transforming collective identities, for instance, clan affiliation becomes a daily reinforcing process to expand livelihood resources.

Likewise, according to Hanna the choice of the area of settlement for new wave migrants is always motivated by their affiliation and by who they know in previous host societies. Tribal affiliation thus becomes important in new ways in Egypt.. For example, the Blain tribe lives in the Cairo neighborhood of Faisal most residents are families who migrated from the Sudan. Saho tribe members live in Ain Shams, and Bani Amer in Dokki. Tribal affiliations inscribe new collective identities across new wave female headed households in Cairo. Socializing with women from the same social class, background and circumstances gives them a sense of belonging. Hanna stated that this is

a new development in Eritrean communities. Previously, most Eritreans they were either female headed families or university students. Recently, there are increasing numbers of the Eritreans in Egypt, single men and women, female headed households, and families. One of the effects of this re-tribalization is the growing level of distrust within Eritrean communities, especially pronounced in providing information related to UNHCR and competitive migration opportunities. Many Eritrean families from Sudan that acquired Sudanese nationality have applied for refugee status as Sudanese. They socialize with Sudanese communities as Sudanese and as members of specific tribes within the Eritrean community.

### **Migration and marriages opportunities:**

The profile of the second group of the new wave of Eritreans is those who came from the Gulf countries to study at Egyptian universities. Many Eritrean students come to Egypt for higher education. They are admitted at Egyptian universities under a bilateral agreement between Eritrea and Egypt. In order to be enrolled the Eritrean embassy gives the names of the potential students to the office of “wafdeen” and gives the students an official letter to allow them to register in the universities. The relationship between the two countries determines the number of Eritrean students who can enter Egyptian universities. Also the Eritrean embassy puts financial burdens on the students to facilitate their names to be listed on the Egyptian universities. In order to benefit from embassy assistance any Eritrean in Egypt has to pay annual fees. Many Eritrean women come from the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to study in Egypt because the accessibility to Egyptian universities. Due to overcrowding in Egyptian universities in recent years, many Eritrean students are unable pursue the higher education for which they came to Egypt in the first place.

Transnational marriages are one aspect of retaining ties to the country of origin. They play a significant role in strengthening the extended kinship network. It is considered an advantage to both partners to come from the same ethnic group as it achieves improved status and opportunity for migration. Marriage emerges as an important topic for the new wave, especially the single men and women prospective



students mentioned previously, as these are linked to migration opportunities. Most of these marriages are arranged or semi- arranged between different families within the same tribe. In the previous chapter, I discussed marriage ideals, demands and opportunities navigated by the second generation, especially their refusal to partake in transnational marriages. One of the consequences of these demands are limited marriage proposals. In contrast, the new wave of Eritrean students in Cairo receives more marriage opportunities. Young women of this group are desired as suitable brides for Eritrean men who live abroad for many reasons: first, they grew up in more conservative societies such as in the Sudan or the Gulf countries, hence they are perceived to be less independent and more traditional. Second, they are considered to be less demanding than the young women who grew up in Egypt. Finally, many men who live in Europe or North America hold the assumption that the Eritrean families in the Middle East will accept them as suitable husbands for their daughters as long as they have citizenship and a stable life/income in the west.

Hanna explained that finding migration opportunities induces many Eritrean families to pressure their daughters to marry men who live in North America and Europe. This raises an important question: To what extent do these young women have the freedom to choose their partner? And do they have the liberty to reject unsuitable partners?. Hanna mentioned that accepting a marriage proposal by the parents depends on the ability of the groom to bring his wife with him. Regardless of his level of education and the living standard he will offer to the bride, or his compatibility with the woman. Many of these families accept that their daughters have transnational marriages until they can join their spouses. The process for migration can take one to two years. Eritrean women from the new wave accept marriage opportunities to lessen the burden on their families. In addition, they can support their families when they resettle with their husbands in the West.

As mentioned before, many European countries have tightened their policies on spousal immigration. Therefore, many Eritrean women who are newly married to Eritrean men in Europe wait for years until they can join their spouses. Hanna observes that many of these types of arranged marriages end up with divorce because the families

usually do not have enough information about the spouse. She further notes that “they agree before marriage on something and it changes after marriage. The family find out that the spouse is not doing the procedure to bring his wife with him, or he doesn’t send her money until she joins him.” She adds “I find it strange that educated women can’t say no to their families and refuse these kind of marriages.” This group of women when they accept to marry men who have legal status/citizenship in Europe or North America, they become part of the transnational lives to communicate with their spouses. Their spouses usually visit them annually if there is no tension between the married couples.

In general, these young women accept the marriage under the pressure from their families. However, they are not entirely passive to that pressure. Some make the decision to escape their reality and move to another country for social advantage. They use the limited opportunities they have in order to strengthen their position (Wang, 2007). Others take marriage decision to support their families.

### **Migration and persecution:**

Eritrea is one of the few African countries in which women joined the armed conflict of the national liberation movement. Following Eritrea’s independence, all men and women between the ages of 18- 20 have to perform National Service (NS), except people with disabilities. The Eritrean government’s aim was to build a new generation of Eritreans. The NS policy as Kibreab (2009) argues represents a tool for social change, economic development, socialization and nation building. NS consists of six month of military training, and twelve months of active military service and development work within the military. After the Eritrean-Ethiopian war in 1998, no one was demobilized after finishing the eighteen months of NS. Furthermore, those who finished their NS were remobilized again. In 2002, the Eritrean government has extended the NS indefinitely, within international law such indefinite commitments are defined as forced labour (Kibreab 2009).

The third segment of new wave migrants to Egypt are young Eritrean women who left due to the economic and political situation, especially the NS. Many of these

women came to Egypt from Eritrea either through Sudan or Uganda. Alia, who came to Egypt in 2004, has seven siblings. Two brothers are in Europe (UK and Sweden), two sisters are in Canada, and two are married in Eritrea. They are currently applying to join their spouses in the Gulf. Alia's youngest brother went to Turkey through Egypt two years ago and is trying to find his way to Europe. Alia mentioned that five of her siblings migrated through Egypt. She left Eritrea because she was avoiding the NS; she mentioned that her sister Nora served in the military for years and then she ran away to Egypt where she applied for refugee status and resettled in Canada. Her elder sister Zahra grew up in Egypt, in 1993 she returned to Eritrea, then she came back again to Egypt before being drafted to the NS. She mentioned that it was her turn to join NS but she kept moving between Asmara and Massawa to avoid conscription. Her sister Nora served in the NS for seven years and she did not want to face the same situation. Alia did not complete her high school in Eritrea because high school is attained in military camps. She went to Uganda and then came to Egypt, "I applied to UNHCR and was granted refugee status, but I didn't benefit anything from them except I have residency in Egypt, I don't want to stay in Egypt. I want to join my brother and sister in Canada."

The predominant image of Eritrean refugees in the Egyptian public sphere is of single women living in Ard El Lewa and working as domestics or nannies. Due to the difficulty of getting asylum in Europe or North America, the temporary stay in Egypt for this group too becomes protracted, leaving them with few livelihood options. Consequently, many of them find themselves working illegally in the informal sector. Alia represents the other image of an Eritrean refugee in Egypt. She came from a middle class family and depends on remittances from her siblings. She did not think that she would wait for years to be resettled, especially as she was added to the file of her two sisters who migrated to Canada through the UNHCR resettlement program. Describing her life in Egypt she says "I thought at first to apply for refugee status will take a long time, but I found out that being accepted for resettlement takes even longer. Since I came to Egypt eight years ago, I tried to make use of my time. I learned Arabic and I took some English classes, I can't join my sisters or brothers and I can't visit my mother in Eritrea. I'm trying to cope with my life in Egypt but I feel alone, I wonder until when I will be

waiting.” Alia mentioned that her mother who lives in Eritrea, needs health care and it took her mother a year to receive permission to travel. Since Alia ran away from Eritrea, the government complicated her mother’s travel process.

When I asked Alia about working in Egypt, she explained that she did not complete her high school and she does not have any skills to find a suitable job in Egypt. Furthermore, working as a nanny or domestic worker is not accepted by her family. Alia’s socioeconomic background shaped her experience in Egypt. Her situation in Egypt represents many other Eritreans from the middle class backgrounds that came to Egypt through direct and indirect ways. This segment of women that Alia represents escaped indefinite military conscription, and they are now trapped in Egypt. They cannot return to Eritrea because they will be subject to torture and punished for betraying the country. Transnational connections are the only survival strategies they have until they find a way to Europe or North America.

Koser (2002) argues that with liberation in 1991 there was a transformation in the Eritrean diasporas from refugee communities to transnational communities. He lists three stages to this transition: first, the decision not to return to Eritrea and the legal status in the host countries; second, the link with Eritrean communities inside and outside Eritrea, which created transnational identities; third, the institutionalization of the diasporas by the Eritrean government. Koser has posed the question of the applicability of the transformation within the Eritrean communities in exile from transnational communities to refugee communities may occur in the Eritrean communities in term of their links with the state. I argue that the new wave of Eritrean women exemplify the transformation. The Eritrean communities from the new wave seek migration opportunities. Applying for refugee status is one way to migrate. Furthermore, they remain active in the transnational system because it is essential for their survival in transit countries such as Egypt. Finally, their link with the Eritrean government diminishes as they become refugees, which means that the transformation that occurs is that they become very active in the transnational system where they negotiate their transnational space to survive and they become refugees in the sense of being part of the refugee experience in Egypt.

## Chapter Six: Revolution and Migration

The meaning of home for many exiled Eritrean women has changed in the context of re-constructing a new home outside Eritrea while maintaining links with family members in different places including Eritrea. Lamia describes the Eritrean diaspora as always have the sense of being refugees, “the meaning of home for Eritreans now has changed, and home is represented in the tie and loyalty to the family.” Egypt is considered home for many Eritrean families that have lived in Egypt for more than three decades. With the beginning of the Egyptian revolution in January 2011, a new centrality has been given to national Egyptian identity in the public sphere, presenting new challenges to refugees/migrants resident in the country. The nationalist climate, the increasing xenophobia and racism, is re-energizing Eritrean women across all generations to push for migration options especially to Europe and North America. . Likewise, Eritrean migrants are increasingly seeking asylum in order to acquire legal status and protection in Egypt.

### First and second generation during and after the revolution:

Many of my interviewees from the second generation consider Egypt their home. Along with their Egyptian counter-parts they have been affected by the worsening economic situation, and general insecurity, and have discrepant views regarding the revolution. Nadia, Soad and Lamia supported the revolution and they considered it a positive movement. Soad especially mentioned the positive changes accompanying the Islamization of the Egyptian state. Nadia participated in the revolution; Lamia and her sister Batoul who grew up in Egypt and live in North America want to return to Egypt to be part of the new Egypt. Others felt that the revolution increased their sense of instability. For instance, Amna usually returned home around 10- 11 pm. Since the revolution she returns home at 6 pm due to security concerns. During and after the revolution many stories circulated concerning violence faced by refugees and migrants. However, none of my middle class interviewees from the second generation, with their deep immersion in Egyptian society and their native speaker facility with Egyptian

Arabic, mentioned any major incidents beyond those experienced by their Egyptian friends and neighbors. What has changed, however, is that while prior to the revolution their main challenge were the limits their situation posed to movement outside of Egypt, since the revolution many of them speak of the need for caution of movement within Egypt, and Cairo in particular, fearing a greater risk of being asked for residency and other kinds of permits. Before the revolution, many Eritreans lived in Egypt without residency, and they did not feel threatened. Since then, the Egyptian government requires that Eritreans process their residency permits through their embassy. Those with expired residency permits are now required to leave Egypt, and submit residency applications upon their return. Many of my interviewees noted that since the revolution questions regarding residency papers occur frequently. Despite their deep social integration in Egyptian society, and despite the pressures of valid residency papers, perhaps the most significant effect of the revolution for the women of the second generation was the inability to legitimately participate in the energy of the political moment as it has been unfolding since 2011. The inability to be politically active, to vote, to participate in social change, highlighted the fact that without formal citizenship rights, in the end, they will always be foreigners in the country they call home. Hence, migration as the only viable option for the future is reemerging as a serious consideration among this segment of the Eritrean population.

New wave experience of the revolution:

During the 25 January – 11 February, 2011 uprising, moving within the city was dangerous and restricted, both by the military and by neighborhood patrols. . Access to the internet and mobile phone networks was shut off by the previous government for three days, banks were closed even longer. Given the central role that this infrastructure plays in transnational families, and coupled with the violence against non-Egyptians, unnerved new wave Eritrean communities in particular. This segment of the community, with limited roots in Egypt, from the beginning of the revolution desired to leave. The number of asylum seekers and individuals who applied for refugee status increased. Also those who had closed files started to re-approach UNHCR seeking protection. Insecurity for people with limited roots in Egypt is experienced in a variety of everyday forms since

2011. For instance, the level of sexual harassment/attack in the streets of Cairo has increased towards all women, but especially towards women from Eritrea, Ethiopia and South Sudan. Refugees complained that their neighbors connect them with the previous regime and they were told “what you are doing here Mubarak is gone and you must go as well.” For many refugees and asylum seekers UNHCR represents a surrogate state that they feel should provide protection. Thus, migrants are seeking to claim refugee status, try to fit into the refugee category, to have an agency to provide the protection they feel they need in the new Egypt. One of the main demands of refugees after January 2011 has been relocation to a safe country. Responding to their demand, UNHCR increased the quota for resettlement for persons of concern. Apart from resettlement opportunities, providing essential services for refugees and asylum seekers such as education, financial, material, and legal and health support is another demand (Danielson, 2012). These services are essential especially to women with children. Danielson (2012) notes the circulation and role of misinformation, rumors, mistrust, and protest as a result of the insecurity that refugees/migrations have been caught up in since the revolution. For instance, Alia informed me of a rumor in which she was told to come to the front of the UNHCR building because they were giving resettlement to those who came to the office as result of the events in Egypt during and after the revolution. This sense of Egypt no longer being a safe country is affecting migration patterns. The level of risk and dangerous routes that migrants are willing to take has increased. Many Eritreans, for instance, attempt to cross the borders to Israel. The increasing rumors that there is no security at the border encourages many Eritrean families to join their husbands who are already in Israel or others who want to escape the economic hardship in Egypt.

Alia mentioned that she is trying to leave Egypt; she went to protest at UNHCR as many Eritreans did. She met with UNHCR staff and they informed her that she would be contacted for resettlement, but that never happened. She explained that she could not take the route to Israel because her family would not support her in that; however she is aiming to find a route to Europe. Finding legal channels for migration is next to impossible. During and after the revolution many Egyptians attempted to migrate illegally to Italy. Many of the Eritreans as well are willing to take the risk of taking illegal

channels of migration to Europe. However, an increasing number of Eritreans are taking the route to Israel. And they face the risk and the danger associated with trafficking.

**End remarks:**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the connection between class and displacement and how socioeconomic background shapes the lives of three different generations of Eritrean women who lived in Egypt. Three main themes were identified through the thesis: rights, choice and class. My findings indicate that the first generation of Eritrean women were not socially excluded by the host society, but excluded themselves. Their socioeconomic background shaped their experience in Egypt.

The social exclusion of the first generation did not affect negatively the process of integration of the second generation, in terms of having access to education and employment in Egypt. A obvious links exists between the transnational lives both the first and the second generation lived and the rejection of the second generation transnational marriages. The research revealed that there are gender specifics in the process of integration by the second generation of Eritrean men who grew up in Egypt, Eritrean men have different experiences than women. They faced more challenges in accessing higher education and employment and that is one of the main reasons for them to migrate.

The new wave of Eritrean women in Egypt experience refugeeness. They chose to come to Egypt to find migration opportunities. They desire better life opportunities for their children. Also those who came to Egypt for education accept transnational marriages to alleviate the burden on their families. The new wave of Eritrean women is similar to the first generation, and faces social exclusion in Egypt. Some of the new waves of Eritrean women enjoy Sudanese citizenship rights where they move to Egypt and apply for refugee status; in contrast, the second generation of Eritrean women lacks the right of citizenship which influences their decision to migrate. In general, all three generations are trying to find migration opportunities after the revolution in Egypt.



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## **Appendix 1**

### **Background information:**

1. Name (to be change in the process of writing the research)
2. Age
3. Marital Status
4. Number of children
5. Place of origin
6. Year of arrival in Egypt
7. Ever return to Eritrea
  - How many times?
  - For what reasons?

### **Displacement Experience:**

1. The occasioned flight?
2. With whom did you flee?
3. Where did you flee initially?
4. How would you describe your life back home?
5. What would you say and you family's social status back home?

### **Life in Egypt:**

1. How do you find life in Egypt?
2. Why did they choose to come to Egypt?
3. Do you have any skills that was useful to you here in Egypt?
4. How/ what were you doing to survive from day to day in Egypt?
5. Have you benefited in any way by living in Egypt?
6. What obstacles did you face in Egypt?
7. How did you encounter these obstacles?
8. What were the facilities available to them?
9. Can you describe how your life changed since you came here?
10. How many time did you moved since you came in Egypt

11. How is your experience with housing in Egypt?
12. What kind of problem do you face with housing?
13. Have you ever tried to work in Egypt? if yes, where if not, why?
14. Do you receive any monetary support from people outside?
15. Since you came to Egypt who takes daily life decisions?

**Income Activities:**

1. Did you ever work in Egypt? If yes, where did you work?
2. If no, why haven't you tried to work?
3. When you face short in your income how do you manage? Like sale assists, reduction of expenditure or taking loans (from who)?
4. Do you have any activities that generate your income?
5. Do you save money? Why? Saving strategies?

**Community:**

1. Have you lived in any other society other than Egypt?
2. Do you feel that you are part of a community here?
3. Did you speak Arabic when you first came to Egypt?
4. How did the Egyptian society perceive you?
5. What is your relationship with your neighbors?
6. Can you describe your interactions and relations with Egyptians?
7. Can you describe your interactions and relations with the Eritrean community?

**Legal Status in Egypt:**

1. How did you obtain your residency in Egypt?
2. Have you applied to the UNHCR, when did you apply?
3. Did you tried to
4. Why did you not apply to the UNHCR when you first came to Egypt?
5. When did you first know about UNHCR, how did you know about it?
6. Have you been to Mogama' , how was your experience?

**Education:**

1. How was your experience in enrolling your children for school?
2. Where do your children go to school? Privet or public schools?
3. Did you receive any assistance in enrolling your children, from where?

4. Relations with the Eritrean embassy or any diplomatic office:
5. What kind of assistance do you get from the Eritrean embassy for education and residence?
6. Did the Eritrean diplomatic office help you in obtaining residency when you first came to Egypt?
7. Did you sense any change in treatment because of your political affiliation?

Were your day-to-day activities affected by the revolution (i.e. your work, your school your social activities, etc.?) How were these affected? Did you make changes to your routines voluntarily, or did you feel compelled to do so (i.e. by the closure of your school or workplace, or by the way in which you felt in public)?<sup>7\*\*</sup>

When in public, did you feel as though you were in any way treated differently than prior to the revolution? Did you experience any physical or verbal harassment? If so, what kind of harassment did you experience? Was it different from or similar to the harassment (if any) you experienced prior to the revolution? Can you give examples of any instances that stand out in your mind?<sup>\*\*</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The question with two stars were taken for another research  
Czajka, A (2011). *Migrants and Refugees in Revolutionary Egypt: Discourses of Nationhood and Foreignness During and in the Aftermath of the January 25<sup>th</sup> Uprising*. Egypt: American University in Cairo.

## Appendix 2

### Background information:

1. Name (to be change in the process of writing the research)
2. Age
3. Marital Status
4. Year of arrival in Egypt
5. Ever return to Eritrea, How many times? For what reasons?
6. Do you identify your ethnic background as Eritrean?

### Integration questions:

1. I want you to think about growing up in Egypt. Who did you live with when you were growing up? For example, did you live with your mom? Did you live with your dad? Did you live with any brothers and sisters? How many? <sup>8\*</sup>
2. Can you describe to me your area of residence; where you grew up and where you reside now. What are the factors affecting your (parents) choice of residence.\*
  3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
  4. Were there any barriers to attaining your desired education achievements?\*
  5. How did you financed your education?\*
  6. Upon completion of your studies, how difficult do you anticipate it will be to gain employment in what you have studied?\*

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<sup>8</sup> The questions with one star were taken from another research were conducted on Eritrea in Canada Hassan, F. (2006). *Resilient Teens: Social Exclusion of Parents and Impact on the Second Generation Eritrean Youth*. Toronto, Canada : Universty of Toronto.

7. How do you describe your mother relation with the Egyptian society?
8. Has your Mother's financial situation influenced the decisions you have had to make with regards to school or work? For example, has their financial situation delayed your entrance to post-secondary education or was it a factor in leading you to take on certain jobs\*
9. Do you work in Egypt ? If yes, what is your current work?
10. Are you connected with any Eritrean community in Egypt?
11. In your opinion and from you experiences, what kind of resources does the Eritrean community have to offer Eritrean youth in Egypt? \*
12. In your opinion, do you feel that the community and the resources it has to offer have been developing towards catering to the issues and problems Eritreans face in Egypt?\*
13. Do you feel economically and socially integrated in Egyptian society?\*
14. What would you say were/are some of the obstacles to your adaptation and integration into Egyptian society \*
15. To the best of your abilities, can you describe to me what you think the Egyptian identity is Do you think of yourself as fitting this description of the Egyptian identity\*

Were your day-to-day activities affected by the revolution (i.e. your work, your school your social activities, etc.?) How were these affected? Did you make changes to your routines voluntarily, or did you feel compelled to do so (i.e. by the closure of your school or workplace, or by the way in which you felt in public)?\*\*

When in public, did you feel as though you were in any way treated differently than prior to the revolution? Did you experience any physical or verbal harassment? If so, what kind of harassment did you experience? Was it different from or similar to the harassment (if any) you experienced prior to the revolution? Can you give examples of any instances that stand out in your mind?\*\*\*

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Background information:**

1. Name (to be change in the process of writing the research)
2. Age
3. Marital Status
4. Number of children
5. Place of origin
6. Year of arrival in Egypt
7. Do you identify your ethnic background as Eritrean?
8. Ever return to Eritrea? How many times? For what reasons?

#### **Community:**

1. Have you lived in any other society other than Egypt?
  2. Do you feel that you are part of a community here?
  3. Did you speak Arabic when you first came to Egypt?
  4. How did the Egyptian society perceive you?
  5. What is your relationship with your neighbors?
  6. Can you describe your interactions and relations with Egyptians?
  7. Can you describe your interactions and relations with the Eritrean community?

#### **Legal Status in Egypt:**

1. How did you obtain your residency in Egypt?
2. Have you applied to the UNHCR, when did you apply?
3. Why did you not apply to the UNHCR when you first came to Egypt?

Were your day-to-day activities affected by the revolution (i.e. your work, your school your social activities, etc.?) How were these affected? Did you make changes to your routines voluntarily, or did you feel compelled to do so (i.e. by the closure of your school or workplace, or by the way in which you felt in public)?\*\*

When in public, did you feel as though you were in any way treated differently than prior to the revolution? Did you experience any physical or verbal harassment? If so,

what kind of harassment did you experience? Was it different from or similar to the harassment (if any) you experienced prior to the revolution? Can you give examples of any instances that stand out in your mind?\*





THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO  
OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

**To:** Naseem Hashim (CMRS student)  
**cc:** Martina Rieker (IGWS)  
**From:** Graham Harman, Associate Provost for Research Administration, Chair of the IRB  
**Date:** January 23, 2012  
**Re:** approval of study

*graham harman*

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This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled "Eritrean Women in Egypt," and determined that it required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" heading. As you are aware, the members of the IRB suggested certain revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully.

Thank you and good luck.

