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

**The economic and social integration of the Syrian migrants and refugees in  
ElRehab city in Egypt**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Egyptology and Anthropology (SEA)

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

By Miranda Mohamed Mahmoud  
August 2017

Under the supervision of

Dr. Gerda Heck (Thesis Supervisor)  
Dr. Sossy Kasbarian (Thesis Reader)  
Dr. Helen Rizzo (Thesis Reader)

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my family. To the ones who love me unconditionally and care for me all through my life.

To my mother, you are the reason of every good thing in my life....I love you.

To my father, thank you for your continuous care.....I love you.

To my husband, no words can express my gratitude to your endless support....I love you.

To my sister, thank you for making me smile during tough times....I love you.

To my kids, you give meaning to my life... I love you.

Thank you for your never-ending support and encouragement...

I hope that this work makes you proud of me.

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All thanks to God for all his blessings.....

My deepest gratefulness goes to Dr. Gerda Heck, Dr. Sossy Kasbarian, and Dr. Helen Rizzo for their guidance. Thank you for your valuable comments and support that helped completing this thesis. Without your efforts, this thesis would have never seen the light....

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Finally, I would like to thank all my Egyptian and Syrian participants who opened their hearts to me during the fieldwork. Thank you for your time and effort.

## Abstract

The current Syrian refugee crises have captured the world's attention. Much of the existing research have focused on the humanitarian and security impacts of Syrians' displacement in hosting countries. This research, explores how Syrian refugees in ElRehab city are unique through focusing on their economic and social impacts on the city since the beginning of their arrival in 2011.

The study also sheds light on the relation of Syrian refugees and the Egyptian state. Moreover, it states the distinct reasons that dejects them from registering as asylum seekers with UNHCR.

Syrians' and Egyptians' integration in ElRehab city existed through shared work and life experience. The study found a high degree of successful integration approach. However, several challenges persist. Along the way, the thesis provides recommendations that can amplify the positive benefits of Syrian refugees while modifying the negative consequences.

Finally, during the fieldwork, through the participants' voices, numerous themes emerged explaining the challenges that Syrian females face. Like many Egyptian women, harassment is one of their daily lives challenges. Moreover, most of the Syrian women I interviewed are new comers to the labor market as they were only housewives in Syria. The research highlights Syrian women's struggle in coping with their new lifestyle in a new hosting country. The thesis explores the media's role in generating the stereotype of Egyptian-Syrian marriages and its effects on the perceptions of Syrian women within the Egyptian community.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### General Introduction

The current war in Syria has caused one of the worst human crises in recent years that has affected the entire Middle East. In the Conference on the Syrian Refugee Status on the 28th of October 2014, Mr. Antonio Guterres, secretary general of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), argued that “The Syrian situation is the most dramatic humanitarian crisis the world has faced in a very long time...The contribution of host countries in protecting refugees is so fundamental that it makes them by far the largest humanitarian donors in the Syrian context. And yet, while international support to match their efforts has been remarkable, it is clearly not in proportion with the immense needs created by this crisis” (UNHCR, 2014: para 2).

The displacement within Syria and the flight of refugees across borders is massive. Over five million people have fled Syria since 2011, seeking safety and placement in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt (UNCHR, 2017). This does not include the refugees who did not register themselves or the migrants who have already been living in these countries for several years. In general, the arrival of a massive number of refugees can have either social, economic, political, and environmental effects on host countries. One of the negative effects is the impact of refugees/migrants on overall average wages in the host country. Borjas and Katz (2005) examined the impact of the 1980-2000 Mexican origin migrant influx on U.S. wages. They found that on average, immigration lowered the wage of native workers by 3 percent for the average worker. On the other hand, refugees can boost the economic performance of the host countries. For example, a recent impact evaluation of refugee camps in Daadab, Kenya, which hosts one of the largest refugee populations in the world, estimates that the total annual direct and indirect benefits of the camp operation for the local host community were around US\$82 million in 2009, and is projected to reach US\$100 million. Some of the funds for the camp operation are allocated to infrastructure investments that benefit the host community. The impact of the Daadab camps on the local

host community is widely felt through trading opportunities and reduced food and commodity prices (Nordic Agency for Development and Ecology, 2010).

By the beginning of 2017, the number of Syrians registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt was around 122,000 (UNHCR, 2017c). However, the actual number of Syrians in Egypt is much higher, as this figure represent only those who registered with UNHCR. Most of the Syrians I met during my fieldwork are not registered as refugees with the UNHCR. They have their residency registered with the Egyptian state either based on their children's schools or universities or based on temporary tourist visas. Syrians' residency statuses in Egypt and their relationship to Egyptian laws will be further examined in chapter four. Syrian refugees in Egypt are living in various governorates such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Damietta. They chose their locations based on the recommendations of their families or friends who had arrived in Egypt before them. In Cairo, most of the Syrians are residing in either 6th of October and ElRehab cities. In these places, people feel that they are indeed in Syria, from the sounds of the Syrian accent, to the aromatic scents of their exquisite cuisine.

## **Background:**

In 2008, my husband and I moved to ElRehab city. It was a small apartment that suited us well at that time. I was very glad and satisfied to be one of ElRehab inhabitants mainly because it was a closed, self-sufficient community. The availability of services such as house cleaners, plumbers, carpenters, supermarkets, hospitals, pharmacies, banks, police station and many others facilitated my life.

As our family grew, the need for a bigger apartment had become a reality. We were content in ElRehab city so we thought of selling the small apartment and buying a bigger one inside ElRehab city as well. I started searching for a new apartment through various brokers. During my search, I was astonished with the immense number of brokers whose offices are located either in the market (السوق) or in the malls. At that time, around mid-2009, ElRehab properties' prices had increased to more than double the prices of other places in New Cairo. This increase in price led us move outside of ElRehab city, yet we chose to remain in its vicinity to keep enjoying its services that we had grown accustomed to having.

The day that triggered my curiosity to study ELRehab city's residents was in the year 2012 after Egypt's initial uprising and the start of the ongoing Syrian civil war. We were going out with some friends at a café in ElRehab. We chose a random café and after a while, we found out that we were the only Egyptians in the café; all the clients were Syrians. One of the Syrian clients sitting next to our table asked us astonishingly if we are Egyptians! At that point, I decided to study ElRehab city as a unique urban area in Egypt with its Syrian presence.

I selected to study Syrians specifically in El-Rehab city, as it is a diversified community in Egypt. ElRehab city accommodates around 200 thousand residents (ElRehab, 2011). The city opens its gates daily to many employees and workers in its markets. Both residents and workers in ElRehab city are from different nationalities, including Syrians, Libyans, Iraqis, in addition to Egyptians. They belong to a variety of social, educational, and financial backgrounds. This diversity will inevitably enrich the results of the research. My thesis focuses on Syrians in ElRehab city, as it is an area that is not well researched although it has a considerable number of Syrians living in close proximity and forming a physically close Syrian community in one

compound. Syrians in ElRehab city are either working in the city only or residing there only or both working and residing there at the same time. In general, ElRehab city facilitates the formation of a closed gated community. People living there can stay in the city without the need to go out, as it is a full-fledged city providing residents with most of their daily needs. In particular, Syrians in ElRehab city stand out among the ElRehab community in both business and communal life. Syrians live and socialize in groups that are distinguished by their unique Arabic accent, some women's unique veil style (as their veil covers their chin along with their neck whereas Egyptian women do not cover their chin with their veil), and their general physical appearance (where Syrians in general have lighter skin and hair color than Egyptians). Their shops in ElRehab city are also notable by their Syrian names and products.

### **Research Questions:**

My main research question is concerned with the business and social integration of Syrians in ElRehab city in Egypt. As compared to Europe, Syrians have integrated somewhat easier into Egyptian communities. Since 2011, Egypt has welcomed Syrian migrants and refugees to live among its citizens and has not isolated them in camps. Most Syrian refugees in Egypt live in urban areas such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Upper Egypt. They share and rent whatever housing they can afford. They are creating their own Syrian communities that integrate within the Egyptian society. For example, they live in physically close neighborhoods to support each other. But at the same time, they are getting to know their Egyptian neighbors to make new friends and communities in Egypt.

In the first chapter, I will examine the relationship between the Syrian refugees in ElRehab city and the Egyptian state. I will study Syrian refugees' rights in Egypt in terms of laws, economic activities, schools, and health care. I will examine to what extent are Syrians aware of their rights in Egypt and how are they making use of them. What are their opportunities and threats in Egypt? In addition, how can the Egyptian law change (from the refugees'/migrants' point of view) to facilitate making their lives more comfortable in Egypt?

My second chapter relates to the social and business integration of Syrian refugees with Egyptians living and working in ElRehab city. What is the perception of the "the other" from Syrians' and Egyptians' points of view? What are the effects of the Syrian migrants and refugees

on business outcomes in ElRehab city? What are the potentials and threats that Syrian workers and business owners have on business and job opportunities in ElRehab city? What are the insights of Syrians' business style? How has the inflow of Syrian entrepreneurs affected the products and services offered in ElRehab city? Moreover, how have my perceptions of Syrian workers and business owners changed after getting to know them better during my fieldwork? How are the Egyptian and Syrian communities integrating with each other as neighbors, friends, and co-workers? Finally, how is the increase in the demand on housing rentals and sales affected the real estate market in ElRehab city? In this chapter, I will be mainly focusing on the food and restaurants sector in ElRehab as this is the field in which both Egyptians and Syrians excel. Egyptians are fond of food. Moreover, Egyptians are increasingly eating out and consequently trying new cuisines and dishes. Egyptians eat out "an average of 12 times per week. That beats out even the world's top restaurant goers, residents of Hong Kong, of whom 66 percent eat out at least once every day of the week" (Ferrer, 2013). Eating out in Egypt ranges from grabbing a sandwich for two pounds (for example, foul and falafel sandwiches) to fine dining in restaurants. In addition to the food business- where Syrians excel- I will be interviewing Syrians from other professions such as hairdressers, doctors and teachers.

My third chapter highlights the challenges faced by Syrian females in ElRehab city. What are the perceptions of Syrian women in ElRehab city and how do these perceptions affect their integration into Egyptian society there? This chapter explores the dynamics of Syrian-Egyptian marriages in ElRehab city. What are the daily, lived realities of refugee Syrian women in ElRehab city in Egypt? What are the challenges they face in their work and social life? How are they dealing with harassment (when relevant)? How they are contributing to the welfare of their household? Finally, how are they integrating economically and socially in ElRehab city if at all?

### **Background on Syrians and the Food Business:**

As mentioned earlier, my focus in chapter two will be mainly on players in the food business: workers, consumers, and/or business owners. This is an industry where many Syrians have achieved success. In fact, working in the food business is highly suitable for Syrian refugees/migrants for many reasons. Syrians are famous for their love of food. It is unlikely, if not impossible, that you can get two Syrians to sit and talk together without their talking about

food (Al-Rifai, 2016). In general, there is a strong relationship between food and memory. For refugees and migrants who are away from their family and their hometown, food is not only a meal they eat, but also the desire to preserve traditions and to protect ancestral feelings through tastes and smells. The need to maintain their identity within a foreign country is so strong that food may develop a mythical status, a “more authentic” flavor, than actually found in the country of origin. Food is central to our sense of identity as we are constructed biologically, psychologically and socially by the food put into our bodies (Heck, 2003).

Syrians have proved this immense interest in the food business in many countries, not only in Egypt. For example, after the 2011 war, most of the Syrian Armenians<sup>1</sup> left Syria to Armenia. Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan declared that in the past few years Armenia has accepted 16,000 refugees from Syria. In fact, 16,000 refugees are significant for a country with a population of three million (Zolyan, 2015). Like the case in Egypt, Armenia has an elevated level of unemployment. Syrian Armenians faced a demanding situation in Armenia. They also started new small businesses, mainly in the food sector making Syrian food very famous there. Over the past couple of years, many small establishments have opened across Yerevan bearing names unexpected for the city such as 'Abu Akob', 'Aleppo Lunches', or 'Pizza and Za'atar'. They offer an authentic atmosphere, not only the hummus and falafel that have become so familiar, but more exotic Middle Eastern dishes as well (Zolyan, 2015). The Syrian-Armenians have been encouraged by the fact that locals warmly welcomed the tastes and the smells of their cuisine, bringing with them new flavors and cooking styles to a country more accustomed to a milder cuisine (Grigoryan, 2016). However, unfortunately, Syrian Armenians are facing major integration challenges upon their arrival back to Armenia. These challenges include housing problems and underemployment. (For example, some families that consist of elderly, single headed households or young students face more problems in their integration, due to restrictions in their ability to work, limited number of job opportunities, and low wages) (Zolyan, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Armenians forcibly moved to the territory of modern Syria in 1915 after the Turkish state deported Armenians to camps in the desert near the Syrian town of Deir-ez-Zor, where they were condemned to a slow death by hunger and disease. Of those who managed to survive, many settled in Syria. Armenians who lived in Syria were called the Syrian Armenians. Due to 2011 war, Syrian Armenians have recently migrated back to Armenia after living in Syria for centuries (Zolyan, 2015).

Likewise, in Egypt, the practice of cooking has gone beyond being one of the ways that connects Syrians to the diaspora. It is now a business that helps to bring in a steady income. There are several types of food entrepreneurs in Egypt that vary from catering and delivering Syrian food from home to opening big Syrian restaurants. When I asked Om Hamed<sup>2</sup>- an elderly Syrian woman selling Syrian dessert plates in ElRehab city- about the source of the products she sells, she replied, “a Syrian factory in AlAresh Governate is the source. Syrians living there cook these desserts and give it to us to sell; this is not mine (الحاجات دي مش بتاعتي)” (personal communication, March 15, 2017). The main objective of this chapter is to better understand the effect that the absorption of Syrians in the food business in ElRehab city has had on the restaurants’ menus, recipes, meals’ and dishes’ labeling, prices, hygiene procedures, and dialects used. This will be discussed in further details to recognize how the Egyptian food business in ElRehab city reacted to the new market. Do Egyptians employ Syrian cooks or do they use the food made by Syrian women cooking and delivering from home? Do Egyptians and Syrian entrepreneurs cooperate? Have Egyptian restaurants in ElRehab city altered any Egyptian recipe meals to compete with the market?

### **The Syrian Civil War:**

There are various reasons that triggered the antigovernment protests all around Syria in 2011 that ended up with the division of the country into several main factions. Furthermore, “the conflict is now more than just a battle between those for or against Al-Assad. It has acquired sectarian overtones, pitching the country's Sunni majority against the president's Shia sect, and drawn in regional and world powers. The rise of the jihadist group Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has capitalized on the chaos and taken control of large swathes of Syria and Iraq, where it proclaimed the creation of a (caliphate) in June 2014” (“Syria: The story of conflict”, 2016: para 2&6)

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<sup>2</sup> Om Hamed is an elderly Syrian woman whom I interviewed. She was selling Syrian dessert plates in ElRehab city. She seemed very old, exhausted, and poor. She was wearing a black Galabeya and veil. The food that she sells is produced by Syrians living in ElAresh city, in Sinai. She told me that these factories in AlAresh city sends them these Syrian dessert plates every day to sell them in ElRehab city. She mentioned that she applied for the UNHCR yellow card so that she would benefit from their monthly assistance. She is living in Giza with her grandson and she commutes to ElRehab city every day. The trip from Giza city to ElRehab city consumes an average of 1-2 hours per day.

In the year 2000, President Bashar ElAssad- who succeeded his father as the ruler of the country- continued his father's non-democratic leadership style through imprisoning political dissenters. The trigger of the revolution was the arrest of young students after writing anti-government messages on walls. In May 2011, the Syrian government, led by Assad, deployed soldiers to Homs, Daraa and areas of Damascus to quash the non-armed anti-government protests. Leaders throughout the world, including U.S. President Barack Obama, called on Assad to step down, as violence grew throughout the region. In August 2011, Syrian military officials who had defected formed the Free Syrian Army, one of the main rebel groups opposing Assad. In November 2011, the Arab League voted to suspend Syria and issued sanctions against the country. In December 2011, a double suicide bomb in Damascus killed 44 people while security forces massacred at least 200 in the Idlib province. Since then, the war is still ongoing. In January 2012, the bombardment of Homs and other cities continued, as the Al-Nusra front, a rebel group created in mid-2011 with help from Al Qaeda and the anti-Assad militant group known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), officially declared its existence and emerged as one of the foremost opposition forces. In March 2013, rebel forces captured the city of Raqqa, making it the first large city controlled by opposition fighters. In August 2014, the Islamic State group (ISIS) seized the northern city of Raqqa. In September 2014, the U.S., along with five Arab nations, began airstrikes targeting ISIS near Aleppo and Raqqa and in September 2015, Russia began airstrikes on ISIS in Syria. Observers on the ground, including the U.S. military, said that Russian airstrikes were not just attacking ISIS but were targeting rebel groups in an attempt to prop up Assad (Mchugh, 2016). Consequently, the threat of death and deteriorating living conditions forced millions of Syrians outside their country. Egypt is one of the main host countries to Syrian refugees.

### **Migration to Egypt:**

Egypt is a large country of over 90 million people. The unemployment rate reached 13 percent in June 2013 (Al-Shuwekhi, 2016). Moreover, since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Egypt has experienced a drastic fall in both foreign investment and tourism revenues, followed by a 60% drop in foreign exchange reserves, a 3% drop in growth, and a rapid devaluation of the Egyptian pound. All this has led to mushrooming food prices, ballooning unemployment, and a shortage of fuel and cooking gas – worsening Egypt's crisis (Kingsley,

2013). The UNDP estimates that Egypt would need to create thousands of new jobs each year to accommodate the demands of new jobseekers entering the market (UNDP, 2016).

While refugees/migrants are required to obtain work permits to work in Egypt, securing these permits is an expensive, lengthy, and complicated process. It requires both that an employer sponsor the refugee/migrant and that there be no competition from a similarly qualified Egyptian candidate. Therefore, refugees are more likely to work in unregulated sectors and occupations with few protections. As a result, refugees tend to open new small businesses in the host country. This is also a faster way of making money instead of waiting for a job after settling in a new country. The difference between migrants and refugees in the labor market is that migrants do not travel from one country to another before they obtain a confirmed work offer or contract. On the other hand, refugees are displaced to another country due to an emergency situation. This does not give them a chance to obtain a work contract before arriving to the new host country. (The detailed difference between migrants and refugees will be discussed later in this chapter). The phenomenon of having refugees opening their new small private business was a reality in Egypt before the Syrians' arrivals in 2011. After the 2003 war in Iraq, a considerable number of Iraqi entrepreneurs transferred their capital and production sites to Egypt and "were able to invest their savings in Cairo, starting small businesses such as restaurants, bakeries, and shopping centers. Yet such shops, owned and managed by families of migrants, are often temporary small enterprises, easily affected by fluctuations in rent prices and problems with local business partners" (Pascucci, 2015: 350).

Currently, some religious institutions play a role in refugees' and migrants' adaptation, security, material benefits, and group solidarity because of discrimination and lack of legal status. Churches play a significant role in supporting refugees in Egypt. For example, St. Andrew's United Church of Cairo founded the STARS (St. Andrew's Refugee Services) program that began serving refugees through English language courses and community support programs since 1979. It is dedicated to improving the quality of life of refugees and vulnerable migrants through education, psychosocial, and legal aid programs. Stars is offering these services to many refugees in Egypt displaced from different countries including Syrian refugees ("Stars",

2017). In addition, since 1977, Caritas Egypt<sup>3</sup> Refugees office is providing refugees and asylum seekers coming from various countries all over the world numerous services. This includes counseling, medical services, vocational training, monthly subsistence allowance, and emergency grants. Moreover, Caritas Egypt is implementing UNHCR programs, which grant financial assistance and subsidized primary healthcare to Syrians and many other refugees through its clinics (UNHCR, 2017b). In addition, there were various attempts from well-known mosques in Egypt to help Syrian refugees. (This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6).

### **Migrants, Refugees and International Law:**

Many social researchers consider migration to be one of the most important phenomena of our time. Since the late 1970s, there has been an increasing international awareness of the severe impacts that a considerable number of migrants and refugees can have on host countries, especially developing ones. As stated earlier, the countries that host migrants and refugees experience long-term economic, social, political, environmental and many other consequences. Those impacts can have both positive and/or negative influences on the host societies. Those impacts vary according to many factors, such as the economy of the host countries, the nature of the relationship between the host communities and the migrants, and other factors.

In recent years, migration has become a vital topic due to the surge of wars all over the world, and the urge that many people have to leave their countries. It is important to differentiate between refugees and other kinds of migrants. The United Nations, via the 1951 Refugee Convention, defines a refugee as someone who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (“The Refugee Convention, 1951”). This does not include other reasons such as searching for economic opportunity or education as well as medical reasons, social status, and other reasons. This definition has also been expanded by many to include violence and war (rather than simply fear of persecution), famine and natural disasters (Stark, 2004). Moreover, the case of

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<sup>3</sup> Caritas is partner organization with UNHCR and serves only as a source of financial and medical assistance for refugees in Cairo and Alexandria, <http://www.caritas.org/>

refugees from the Middle East and the North African region (which includes Syrian refugees' due to the current war) is covered by the Organization of the African Union (OAU)'s 1969 Convention that gives additional criteria to define a refugee. In this Convention, "the term "refugee" shall also apply to every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality" (Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, 1969: para.14). According to this convention, host countries should give refugees social and political rights. Syrians are thus considered as asylum seekers who should not be sent back to their home country. Chapter four will examine whether Egyptian laws adhere to these conventions or not, regarding Syrian refugees.

Scholars have further delineated the difference between refugees and migrants by looking at the size of the group and nation of origin. Refugees are usually ones who typically move as a part of a larger group of people rather than as individuals (Stark, 2004). On the other hand, migrants are people traveling by choice from one place to the other for a better economic opportunity or education. According to the UNCHR, a migrant is also a person who can go back anytime to his/her country if he/she wished. The UNHCR defines economic migrants as "persons who leave their countries of origin purely for economic reasons not in any way related to the refugee definition, or in order to seek material improvements in their livelihood. Economic migrants do not fall within the criteria for refugee status and are therefore not entitled to benefit from international protection as refugees" (UNHCR, 2006: 14). Unfortunately, due to the current war conditions in Syria, both migrants (mainly most of those who traveled by choice before 2011) and refugees (those who travelled during the current Syrian war) do not have the opportunity - due to security reasons- of going back to their home country any time soon.

Egypt does not have an official policy regarding asylum. The only documented agreement is the 1951 Convention where Egypt was one of the countries that signed the convention involving the Status of Refugees in 1951. Before activating the 1951 convention, the Egyptian government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 1954 with UNHCR. Under this MoU, UNHCR Egypt accepted to conduct Refugee Status Determination (RSD) on behalf of the government. Even after the 1951 authorization, the MoU is still considered the

reference document for the “division of labor” between the Egyptian government and the Refugee Organization. It was never updated to reflect the new order of things following the ratification of the Convention (Badawy, 2008).

During my fieldwork, I was astonished that a noticeable number of Syrians did not want to record themselves with the UNCHR as asylum seekers. Most of them wish to be able to return to Syria whenever they want to, a condition that is restricted if someone is a refugee. Some Syrians also perceive refugees as poor people whom they do not want to be associated. When I asked Fayeze<sup>4</sup> (the Syrian sales person in a perfume shop in ElRehab mall) for the reasons why he did not declare himself as an asylum seeker and make use of UNCHR benefits, his body language seemed to reject the idea. He said, “why would I declare myself as an asylum seeker<sup>5</sup>, thank God I am living well in Egypt” (الحمد لله... انا عايش كويس في مصر) (personal communication, April 27, 2017). The benefits of refugees in Egypt will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

### **Egypt as a host country:**

Historically, Egypt was a land of immigrants, not emigrants (Sell, 1988). Until the mid-1950s, foreigners were coming to Egypt while Egyptians rarely migrated out of the country. Egypt was a safe place for many refugees and migrants both politically and economically. Migrants and refugees created many local communities in Egypt that had major contributions at that time. For example, the economic policies of Mohamed Ali, ruler of Egypt (r.1805-48), and of his successors, particularly Isma'il ( r.1863-79), required a great numbers of skilled and unskilled workers both from home and abroad. Those workers were needed to work on large

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<sup>4</sup> Fayeze is a Syrian sales person in a perfume shop in ElRehab city mall. He is a young man in his early 20s. He is a student who came alone to Egypt 3 years ago. He came first to Port Said where his Syrian friends were living and started studying in Port Said National University. He did not like the quality of education offered so he moved to Cairo to study in a private university in ElShorouk city where he also lives in a shared apartment with his Syrian friends. He is working in ElRehab city to earn money for his personal expenses and tuition. He is looking for a chance to receive a graduate scholarship in any private university inside or outside of Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> According to the UNHCR (2006), the definition of Asylum seeker is “an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum-seeker”. (p:4) whereas the definition of the refugee is “A person who meets the eligibility criteria under the applicable refugee definition, as provided for in international or regional refugee instruments, under UNHCR’s mandate, and/or in national legislation”.(p:17).

infrastructure projects such as the expansion of the irrigation system, the construction of a new rail network, and most famously the construction of the Suez Canal. Another example are the Italians who migrated to Egypt at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. “Given the poor economic prospects of Italy, Egypt offered an obvious opportunity to underemployed Italian labor. In time, Italian artisans and craftsmen earned a reputation for their skills in masonry and were key players in the extensive building program of both public and private works in Egyptian cities” (Gorman, 2015: 147).

Egyptians’ interest in migration began in the mid-1950s. This was due to political, demographic, and economic burdens that started at that time. Before that time, the Egyptian government was trying hard to bear the burden of providing continuous job opportunities. However, the increasing population growth, along with the lack of growth in the economic and technological sectors, reduced the state’s ability to provide jobs. Moreover, by 1966, the Egyptian government eased the migration procedures that helped to create a new phenomenon for Egyptians: permanent migration. Many graduate students were tempted to stay abroad due to unfavorable economic conditions in Egypt after the 1967 war and this has continued until the present. Since migration to Egypt started, it has been easier for technical staff and skilled workers to obtain the work permits than the unskilled or semi-skilled workers. Currently, most refugees and forced migrants coming to Egypt are coming due to the immense human rights violations in Africa and the Middle East.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century until the present, Egypt has been hosting refugees from various countries. In a recent meeting with a delegation from the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the Italian Senate, Egypt’s current President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi highlighted the importance of the role of the international community regarding Arab and African refugees, saying that Egypt currently hosts around five million refugees from Arab and African countries. (Ahram online, 2015)<sup>6</sup>. Aside from the latest Syrian refugees in Egypt, there are refugees coming from 38 nationalities, with the main groups being from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Iraq.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/140069/Egypt/Politics-/Sisi-Egypt-hosts-around-five-million-refugees.aspx>

Historically, the relationship between the state and the refugees in Egypt was usually determined by the current government's strategy to deal with those refugees at that time, in addition to the registered national policies. Therefore, different ruling governments in Egypt had different attitudes towards refugees throughout history although they bided by the same policies. This is demonstrated through Egypt's relations with Palestinian, Iraqi, and Sudanese refugees.

The Palestinian refugees are the oldest refugee group in Egypt's recent history. Their arrival started when Egypt opened its doors to them after World War II. The relationship between the Palestinian refugees and the Egyptian government provides further evidence that refugees' situations change according to the ruling Government in Egypt as discussed earlier. Palestinians started fleeing to Egypt during the 1948 war and Egypt under King Farouk responded by putting them in camps. The Palestinians' situation changed when President Abdel Nasser took over in 1952. He had a completely different approach towards Palestinians. He released them from the camps and gave them the rights to education, work, and residency in Egypt. Moreover, they received Egyptian travel documents and were treated as if they were Egyptians. The same strategy continued during President Sadat's time who was heavily involved in the peace process between Egypt and Israel at that time and promised the same commitment regarding Palestinians. However, a major shift in the relationship between the Egyptian Government and the Palestinian refugees occurred in 1978 due to the murder of the Egyptian Minister of Culture Youssef Al-Sibae by the Palestinian Abou Nidal Al-Banna. As a result, the Egyptian state reversed its policies of Palestinians having rights similar to those that nationals have through an official governmental announcement issued on 28 February 1978. Since then, many Palestinians left Egypt to find jobs in other countries and those who still live in Egypt are not enjoying the privileges that they used to have (AlAbed, 2009). Currently, there is an estimated 75,000 Palestinians in Egypt that do not hold formal refugee status (Sadek, 2011).

The Sudanese refugees are the largest community of refugees in Egypt. According to the UNCHR, Sudanese refugees represent 56% of the total refugees in Egypt (UNCHR, 2012b). Egypt and Sudan share a history, as Sudan was part of Egypt for an extended period<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> In 1881, a religious leader named Muhammad ibn Abdalla started unifying tribes in western and central Sudan. By taking advantage of dissatisfaction resulting from Ottoman-Egyptian exploitation and maladministration, the Mahdi led a nationalist revolt culminating in the fall of Khartoum in 1885. The Mahdi died shortly thereafter, but his state

Accordingly, Sudanese refugees used to enjoy long-term residence while preserving their Sudanese nationality. However, as mentioned earlier, their refugee status changes constantly in Egypt according to the political environment. In 2005, UNCHR Egypt suspended all refugee status determination processes due to the break between the Sudanese government and the Sudanese Liberation Army. Although Sudanese were granted the UNHCR yellow card<sup>8</sup> (detailed explanation of UNHCR benefits will be discussed in Chapter 4), they were deprived from primary education, medical care and employment. This break drove some Sudanese refugees with undetermined status to organize a sit-in, in front of the UNHCR building in Cairo. The sit-in was later dispersed by the Egyptian central security forces and left as many as 27 protestors dead and several other injured, according to official reports (Azzam, 2006). Since then, Sudanese refugees have had a high rate of irregular migration from Egypt. Many of them have tried to flee to Israel in the hope of a better life and security of human rights but those who were caught by the Egyptian police were accused of spying.

Finally, aside from the Palestinian and the Sudanese refugees in Egypt, the Iraqi refugees are the most recent, prior to the Syrian refugees, due to the 2003 US led invasion. As of October 2008, 10,243 Iraqis have registered with the UNHCR. This number had dropped to 7,439 by the end of 2012 (UNCHR, 2012b). Most Iraqis came to Egypt due to the extreme insecurity and the declining economy in the country after the invasion and subsequent civil war. Iraqi refugees arrived in Egypt without expectations to stay for long in the country. However, many refugees had prolonged stays in the country, reporting difficulties in making a living, with many starting to work in the informal sector. From 2008 onwards, Iraqis suffered from asset depletion, and the worst-off of the population remained uncertain about their futures (Sadek, 2011). Pascucci (2015) described Iraqis' lives as; "the suspension of productive time sought by the flaneur through the act of strolling thus become subject to the spacing and timings of mass consumerism. Although central in their experience, for young Iraqi refugees in Cairo the suspension of

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survived until overwhelmed by an invading Anglo-Egyptian force under Lord Kitchener in 1898. Since then, Sudan was administered jointly by Egypt and Britain. In 1956, Sudan achieved full independence ("Thoughtco", 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The UNHCR yellow card serves as an identification document for asylum seekers in Egypt. The UNHCR Yellow Card helps them with their daily interactions with the Egyptian authorities. This will also protect asylum seekers from being returned to their home country. Yellow cards help in obtaining residency permit in Egypt, food vouchers and financial assistance, children's school enrollment, subsidized healthcare, and an Egyptian driver's license.

productive time is not something they actively seek. Rather, their repetitive strolling and hanging out in places that are defined as (boring) reflect the lack of structure in their everyday life. Wandering in the mall is thus a practice in which a number of intertwined dimensions of waiting converge in an embodied act” (Pascucci, 2015: 352). During my fieldwork, I have met several Iraqi refugees who were living or working in ElRehab city. They explained that the general economic challenges facing Egypt recently after the Egyptian currency devaluation is affecting them as well. Moreover, the new economic situation in Egypt needs to be further studied, as it is expected to have a strong effect on the relationship between Egyptians and foreigners in the country.

In November 2016, Egypt's central bank floated the Egyptian pound “in an attempt to stabilize its economy, which has been hampered by a shortage of dollars.... The currency was initially devalued by 32.3% to about 13 pounds per dollar, down from the previous peg of 8.8 per dollar” (Holodny, 2016: np). Accordingly, Egyptians perceive foreigners (including Syrians and Iraqis) who have dollars as the rich people who have strong purchasing powers. During my field work, I had the impression that Egyptians felt that Iraqis and Syrians are the lucky people who can buy more with the same money they used to have due to the devaluation of the Egyptian pound. This was also mentioned by Hamdy<sup>9</sup>, an Egyptian manager of a supermarket in ElRehab city, who found that the prices of the products are rapidly increasing especially after the devaluation of the Egyptian pound. However, “Syrians have dollars so they are not suffering”. Similarly, Pascucci (2015) in her work on Iraqis’ lives in Egypt explained, “perceptions and attitudes of locals towards Iraqi migrants are largely determined by social and financial status. Iraqis are usually described as wealthy new settlers whose financial assets are behind the rise in land and rent prices” (Pascucci, 2015: 342). More research needs to be done on the relationship between Egyptians and refugees after the devaluation of the Egyptian pound.

In the following chapter, I will be studying the classical and contemporary theories that focused on the relationship between refugees and hosting countries. This would help understand scholars’ studies on refugees’ positive and negative effects on hosting countries.

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<sup>9</sup> Hamdy is a manager at Grand super market in ElRehab city. Hamdy has been working in this position for the past 4 years. Grand market has been opened in ElRehab city for the past 15 years.

## Chapter 2:

### Conceptual and Theoretical Framework:

Refugees are people who migrated to another country due to severe conditions. The effect of these refugees on the receiving countries depend on how the refugees settle themselves in their new destination, as well as how the receiving countries deal with them. Richard (2014) argues that the human rights element inherent to refugee crises is relatively more clear-cut. But a broader academic discussion has been recently developing around the economic and social effects—both positive and negative—of the sudden influx of refugees on host countries. I will examine in this chapter classical refugees' theories. Then, I will focus on how these traditional theories have developed to more contemporary ones in recent years.

#### Classical Refugee Theories

There are various theories that explains the types of refugees and the relationship between the refugees and the host country. Kunz divided refugees into three distinct groups, derived from their attitudes towards their displacement. “Those refugees whose opposition to political and social events at home is shared by their compatriots, both refugees and those who remain in home areas, are called *majority identified refugees*. Refugees who have left their home areas because of active or latent discrimination against the group to which they belong, frequently retain little interest in what occurs in their former homes once they have left. These refugees, who feel irreconcilably alienated from their fellow citizens are called *events related refugees*. A third type of refugee includes people who decided to leave their home country for a variety of individual reasons. These *self-alienated refugees* feel alienated from their society not by any active policy of that society, but rather by some personal philosophy”(Kunz, 1981: 44).

Currently, the majority identified category can best define the Syrian refugee population who were displaced due to the recent Syrian war in 2011. Kunz (1981) notes that “...these refugees identify themselves enthusiastically with the nation, though not with its government” (p. 43). This group has emotional ties with their families in their homeland and are willing to return once the situation is settled. Most of the Syrians I interviewed in Egypt during my field work (especially employees or workers) mentioned that they are ready to move back to their beloved home country Syria once the war ends. They are ready to re-build the country again from scratch.

However I found that Syrians who own private business (especially food business) are reluctant to return their life back fully to Syria if the war ended. They prefer to be living between Egypt and Syria so as not to lose the successful business they have started in Egypt. This is because they believe that Egypt is a larger market. Thus, they usually make more money in Egypt than in Syria.

Earlier in 1973, Kunz released a fine work on refugees' theories called the refugee in flight. Then, he explored the refugees' theoretical concerns for the periods before and after flight in this valuable work published in 1981. The significance to Kunz's model of flight is the idea of push. He argues that the migrant is someone who was pulled by the new land with his own choice (due to opportunities for better income, education, or lifestyle) while the refugee is someone who was pushed out of his country. If the refugee was given the choice, he would stay. Kunz divides refugees into two types of movements: *the anticipatory refugee movement* and *acute refugee movement*. The anticipatory refugee senses the danger early, just before traveling arrangement difficulties arise. In a way, the anticipatory refugee resembles the voluntary migrant. The whole family moves with their resources and personal belongings to a new life. As per UNHCR, these first Syrian arrivals generally relied on personal savings, found work or opened businesses, and they maintained a moderate degree of self-reliance (UNHCR, 2012). For Kunz, the migrant is the one who left the country before critical events, such as wars, while the refugee is the one who leaves after the crisis begins. In addition, the refugee will go to any host country that is willing to take them while the immigrant has a chosen destination. The anticipatory refugee wants to leave and will leave as soon as he finds a country willing to take him/her. Anticipatory refugees are normally better educated and well off. Consequently, the anticipatory refugee is not considered to be a major threat to the host country especially in terms of security. On the other hand, acute refugee movements result from a devastating push. Sometimes war, due to political crisis, or government policy means immediate escape is seen as the only way out. The acute movement is a mass movement due to fear, panic, or hysteria. In an acute movement, the refugees have not planned nor prepared for the journey; they are basically trying to get out of danger.

## Contemporary Refugee Theories

As mentioned earlier, modern refugee theories focus on the effects of refugees on host countries. These effects can be economic, social, environmental, and political.

### Economic Impacts:

#### Positive Economic Impacts:

Refugees can bring positive and negative economic impacts to the host countries. Current literature discusses several ways in which positive effects can occur. First, services that are initially planned and executed specifically for refugees can also be used by the host country's population. For example, the education sector in Uganda encountered a huge influx of refugees from Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Specifically, schools built explicitly for refugee children served local students—who might not otherwise go to school at all—as well. The presence of refugees ensured enrollment stability, thereby helping to keep the schools open and functioning for all children; this in turn encouraged continued investment that improved the educational infrastructure of the country and boosted long-term economic productivity (Dryden-Peterson and Hovil, 2003). Apart from educational institutions, sometimes governments and international organizations invest in other infrastructure developments (such as hospitals or housing expansions) that can be maintained and used for the population at large when the refugee crisis subsides (Zetter, 2012). Therefore, perceived short-term negative economic impacts created by refugees can have positive economic outcomes in the long run.

Second, acute refugees, resulting from wars as mentioned earlier, can be from a variety of demographics. Thus, refugees coming to the same host country can have different education, age, and socio-economic backgrounds. For example, in the 1990s, Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union who settled in the United States were highly skilled and often more educated than Americans, leading to quick economic integration, high labor force participation rates, and high average incomes (Gold, 1994). The same applies in Canada, where 77 percent of refugees arrive with a university or vocational degree (Yu, Ouellet and Warmington, 2007). Bodewig (2015) argues that skilled but underemployed refugees can help in boosting the economy of host countries if given proper chances by the host country's policies. Skilled and educated workers

integrate more easily into the formal labor markets of more developed economies. However, a limiting factor is the proof of qualifications (i.e. certificates) that are essential for professional occupations. These documents are sometimes not available with refugees' due to sudden unplanned movement from their native countries. For example, in the United States, the result has been underemployment for roughly half of the skilled refugees. Naturally, when scientists are driving taxicabs and doctors are working in restaurant kitchens because of lacking proper certification, the potential economic boom they could provide to the host nation is blunted. (Hall et al. 2011). In addition to education, the variety of refugees' age groups is another important demographic factor that can affect the economy of the host country. In this sense, the current refugee influx to some European countries can have great economic boost potential. It is estimated that 81 percent of refugees seeking asylum in the EU in 2015 were between the ages of 18 and 34 (Desilver, 2015). To Europe, these comparatively younger refugees could help lessen a major demographic crisis. For example, Germany—a country often at the center of discussions regarding refugees—is expected to lose 20 million citizens and have one third of its population older than 65 by 2060 (Mounk, 2016). Countries with an aging population may start benefitting from the existence of refugees to fill in the age gaps. This is because young adults are capable to work. Currently many countries in Europe face a decrease in their work force due to their aging populations. The aging problem has emerged in Europe due to the younger generations' tendency to have fewer children and to wait to give birth until later in their lives. In addition, the developed health care systems tend to increase the life expectancy of the population (Tomkiw, 2015). Thus, the aging population in Europe threatens to weaken its economic activity, thus, adding young refugees to the labor market could be the solution.

Third, labor market interactions may have positive economic impacts, although it is often viewed from a negative perspective from the host countries' point of view. The traditional impression is that refugees consume available job opportunities in host countries. However, refugees often take jobs that native citizens are unwilling to take (Karasapan, 2015). For example, Orhan and Gundogar (2015) argues that researchers in southern Turkey found that 40-100 percent of locals who lost their jobs blamed their outcome on the influx of Syrian refugees to the region. However, the authors noted that the perception of many Turkish business leaders was that Syrian refugees are not stealing jobs from the locals; rather, they are filling needed positions for unskilled labor that the local Turks were not interested in taking. On the other hand, other

countries see them as a solution to many problems. Refugees do not necessarily concentrate in and compete for one specific type of job; rather, they pursue a multitude of diversified employment opportunities, and competition is therefore diffused (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, and Omata 2014). However, when refugees do drive out competition for lower-skilled jobs, it can push natives (particularly younger and more inexperienced workers), into increasingly specialized jobs and lead to long-run wage increases for natives on average (Foged and Peri, 2014). The increased competition does not displace native workers from the labor market, but rather forces them to develop a set of higher skilled contributions to the labor force.

Fourth, refugees can improve growth by serving as both productive consumers and producers in their host country. From a consumer perspective, refugees possess enormous purchasing power due to their immense volume (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, and Omata, 2014). Consequently, many local producers see refugees as a significant new consumer market for their products. The influx of many refugees usually create a demand on food, leading to an increase in its prices that benefit the farmers and traders. In Tanzania, for example, many local farmers sell their food surpluses to the considerable number of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi that their country hosts (Verwimp and Maystadt, 2015). Similarly, in Uganda, researchers have found that refugees play a vital role as consumers for local Ugandan producers; studies showed that 68 percent of refugees in rural settlements bought goods from Ugandan producers, while 97 percent of refugees in Kampala (Uganda's largest urban area) bought goods from Ugandan producers (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, and Omata, 2014). Economic activity among refugees in settlement areas and camps can have positive effects for local producers. For example, 80 percent of urban refugees noted that Ugandan producers were their most important suppliers (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, and Omata 2014). On the other hand, the increase in food prices puts more economic pressure on natives in the host countries. From another perspective, studies have found that refugees are more likely than natives and other types of immigrants to become small business owners; this in turn has major effects on local employment—not just for refugees, but for citizens of the host country as well (Gold, 1988). For example, in Uganda, refugee entrepreneurs in urban areas employed local Ugandans for roughly 40 percent of their workforce (Betts, Bloom, Kaplan, and Omata, 2014). The same applies to the Syrian refugees whom I met in ElRehab city. Many of the participants were business owners who employ both Egyptian and

Syrian workers. AlAssel<sup>10</sup>, owner of AlAssel restaurant, mentioned that he employs 200 Syrian and 150 Egyptian workers in his restaurants. This idea of economically productive refugees was strengthened in research by Bollinger and Hagstrom (2011) who, using data on refugees in the 1990s in the United States, found out that refugees were less likely to be considered “poor” by official standards than other immigrants. Similarly, compared to other immigrant groups, refugees have been found to work longer hours (by 4 percent), earn more income (by 20 percent), and take more business risks, all critical tools in establishing productive businesses (Cortes, 2004).

Fifth, refugees and migrants may increase trade between their host country and their country of origin. Migrants may have a strong influence in trade between the two countries. This is because refugees leave their country of origin for more complicated reasons (as war) than migrants do. In addition, refugees’ desire to have any connection with the country of origin might be nonexistent due to these difficult circumstances (Ghosh, 2015). Still, researchers examining refugees in Canada and the United States have found that refugees have a small positive (although less than immigrants) effect on trade outcomes (White and Tadesse, 2010).

### **Negative Economic Impacts:**

On the other hand, refugees are perceived to bring negative economic consequences to host countries. First, refugees can stress the services of host countries. Examples may include housing, healthcare, education, food, water, and utilities (Aiyar et al., 2016). Some local communities perceive the migrants and refugees to be a burden on the economy. This is because they make use of the countries’ public services for a while until they settle down and start working, and thus start giving back to the economy. In addition, the movement of a large group of new people to a country exhausts its security services. An example of this occurred in Tanzania where, in 1990 due to the Rwandan Civil War, 250,000 people made their way into Tanzania from Rwanda. Within the following four years, there became approximately 700,000

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<sup>10</sup> I interviewed Mr Mohamed AlAssel in his shop in ElRehab city. He is a mid-aged man in his early 50s. He arrived to Egypt with his wife and children five years ago. His restaurant offers a range of Syrian food products that includes mainly grilled meat (Kofta and Kebab), grilled chicken, Shawarma sandwiches and many other Syrian side dishes. He has four other branches of the same shop in Egypt. He has four partners, one of them is Egyptian to facilitate paper work with the Egyptian Government and the rest are Syrians. His shop has few tables as it is mainly relying on take away or delivery services rather than dining in.

Rwandans living in regions of Tanzania (Milner, 2000). The main problem that arose from this significant increase of people was violence. With large-scale movement, there was difficulty in distinguishing genuine refugees and those from the Former Government of Rwanda (FGOR) who were responsible for the genocide. Furthermore, refugees may also crowd out natives in local economic markets—from food to housing—and distort prices (Hatton and Williamson, 2003). Turkey, for example, has seen dramatic increases in rental prices for housing because of the refugee crisis (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015). In some cases, dishonest landlords have kicked out lower income Turkish tenants in favor of some Syrian refugees, who are willing to pay higher rents (Orhan and Gundogar, 2015). This was also mentioned by Mostafa<sup>11</sup>, senior broker in ElRehab city. Owners of apartments preferred renting to Syrians rather than local Egyptians due to their ability to pay more (personal communication, April 10, 2017). And as discussed earlier, although some public expenditures may strengthen the long-term infrastructure of a country, this does not come without the short-term cost, namely increased taxation to pay for the project as well as the opportunity cost of foregoing other potential investment opportunities (Zetter, 2012).

Second, when hundreds of thousands of refugees arrive in a certain area that has inappropriate hygiene conditions, disease can spread quickly. The UN has reported that overcrowding has turned refugee camps—in South Sudan, for example—from a welcoming refuge to a squalid encampment teeming with outbreaks of hepatitis, cholera, malaria, and jaundice (Sinha, 2012). This has immediate negative economic effects, but can also have destructive long-term economic outcomes through overcrowding hospitals and clinics (Baez, 2011).

Third, refugees can cause social tensions due to racism from the citizens of the host country. This has been seen most recently in Sweden—a homogeneous nation—through the torching of refugee shelters (Traub, 2016). Refugees can also cause tensions among different receiving countries. For example, in the case of the European Union, where countries like Sweden and Germany have adhered to more of an open-door policy, while some, like Hungary,

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<sup>11</sup> Mostafa is a Senior broker in ElYabanya broker office in ElRehab city market. He has working in this field for 8 years.

have completely closed off their borders (Traub, 2016). This has resulted in a lack of burden sharing that has frustrated countries that are more open.

### **Social Impacts**

Refugees' arrival also has positive and negative socio-cultural impacts on the host community. The UNHCR has also found that when refugees are from the same cultural and linguistic group as the local population, there are greater opportunities for peaceful co-existence and interaction among them (UNHCR, 1997). On the other hand, in host countries that are culturally different, there may be inequalities between refugees and non-refugees that give rise to social tensions (Betts, 2009). Refugees are sometimes viewed as benefitting from privileged access to resources that are not available to the local host population. This is because refugee status sometimes offers an opportunity for education, health, and basic livelihood. However, when social services provided through international funding also target host communities, the possibility of peaceful relations between the local population and refugees increases remarkably.

Barth (1994) argues in his theory concerned with ethnicity and boundaries between refugees and the natives of host countries discusses that: "Boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. In other words, categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories" (Barth 1994:9-10). Barth believes that no matter how a group or an individual come into social or economic contact, they still uphold their ethnic status. He believes that close contact do not affect refugees' or natives' ethnic identity or ways of life. There can be intermarriages among different ethnic groups and they still maintain their cultural differences. His theory believes that when ethnic groups compete for social and economic resources like in the case of the refugees and their host communities, their ethnic categories become more fixed. Moreover, Whitaker (2000) claims that the burdens and benefits associated with refugee presence are not distributed equally among local hosts. Whitaker also adds that the extent to which hosts could benefit from the refugee presence depend on gender, age, and socio-economic class. Therefore, some communities benefit from refugees, while others struggle to maintain access to even the most basic resources. He also believes that young adults are likely to take advantage of these opportunities while the elderly and the disabled are likely to

suffer. He also believes that men benefit more than women from the opportunities created by a refugee situation. For him, women are in charge of their homes and responsible for collecting firewood and water and therefore suffer from environmental conditions. However, many scholars have criticized this opinion, as it might not be the case in certain contexts that women are always negatively impacted by the refugee presence.

Another observation related to the social impact of forced displacement is that social problems such as gender-based dominance and violence often increase during displacement. Women specifically are often more vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation, domestic violence and trafficking. For example, UN data shows that during the first three months of 2010, more than third of the 1,200 sexual assaults against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo took place in the North and South Kivu provinces. This region is not only suffering from constant violence between rebel groups and the military, but also hosts a considerable proportion of refugees from neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2010). Some studies show that gender relations within households are affected by the increasing participation of refugee women in income-generating activities, which affects not only the distribution of resources within households, but also traditional roles of family members (Women's Refugee Commission, 2009). For instance, many male Somali refugees in Sanaa in Yemen face serious challenges to access employment opportunities in the city and depend on incomes earned by female family members. In a traditionally patriarchal society, this dependency situation led to psychosocial disorders, distress, and domestic violence (Morris, 2010).

### **Environmental Impacts**

The presence of large influxes of refugees has also been associated with environmental influences on land, water, natural resources, and slum growth. Environmental impacts are closely associated with the type of refugee settlements and intensive concentration of people in large camps. The most obvious environmental impacts include deforestation, land degradation, unsustainable groundwater extraction, and water pollution. In addition, human waste disposal by displaced persons can contaminate local groundwater and cause the spread of diseases (United Nations Environment Program, 2005). Another observation is that the type of refugee settlements also affects the access of displaced people to land and natural resources. The assessment of the environmental impacts of refugees in Daadab, Kenya also shows that

environmental degradation is a direct consequence of policies aimed at housing refugees in large camps with tight movement restrictions in an area of low productivity (Nordic Agency for Development and Ecology, 2010). Despite some positive experiences of refugees in some host countries, insufficiency of land and natural resources is a serious factor that affects both the refugees and the local populations' lives.

### **Political Impacts**

Jacobsen (2002) argues that hosting refugees gives exposure and visibility to the host state, which can be used for political leverage by skilled politicians. This, however, depends on the state's capacity and willingness to plan the geographical as well as functional or professional distribution of the refugees in an effective way. It also depends on the willingness of the state to embrace the refugees and integrate them into their countries.

## Literature on Recent Syrian Refugees in Egypt

### Syrians' History in Egypt

Both Egypt and Syria have shared some history. Following the 1954 revolution in Syria, the parallel policies of the two countries and the charismatic leadership of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser created support for the idea of a union between the two states. A referendum was held for Syrians and Egyptians to unite their countries. On February 1958, President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Shukri Al-Kuwatli announced the merging of the two countries as the United Arab Republic. However, it was short lived when Syria witnessed another revolution in 1961, it disbanded from the United Arab Republic, and re-established itself as the Syrian Arab Republic (Ayoub and Khallaf, 2014). Many Syrians remained in Egypt after the termination of the United Arab Republic. At the beginning of the 2011 crisis, the first wave of Syrians fleeing to Egypt were primarily composed of persons with family ties, business connections, or personal networks in Egypt (UNHCR, 2012).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Syrians immigrated to Egypt due to the deteriorating economic situation in Syria at a time when Egypt's economy was booming. Cotton exports made Egypt an attractive destination country. Most of the Syrians coming to Egypt were well educated. At that time, they had their greatest impact on the Egyptian economy and culture. They played a pioneering role in modernizing the Egyptian society by, for example, establishing the newspaper and printing industry, as well as a modern banking system (Abdul Hameed, 2014). Highly qualified Syrians found employment opportunities that the successful modernization plan of Khedive Ismail created (Abu-Haidar, 1987). Many Syrian families succeeded in the business sector in Egypt at that time, especially those who settled in Mansoura in Egypt. In Mansoura, Syrians excelled as lawyers, cotton trade entrepreneurs, large real-estate owners, medical doctors and pharmacists, department store, restaurant and hotel owners, bankers, and financial agents. They were also famous for their large estates, like the heirs of Comte Khalil de Saab and the Sussah family, Naguib Bek Sursuq, and the family farm (عزبة) of George Daoud. They owned several international hotels. For instance, Khalil Bahari owned the Semiramis Hotel, which included the best restaurant in Mansoura. Dhaher al-Rayyes was the owner of the largest hotel in Mansoura, the Paris Hotel, while his brother, Bichara, owned the

Claridge Hotel, and a third brother owned the Imperial Hotel. The Syrians of Mansoura occupied key positions such as medical doctors, and bank managers. Some Syrians earned titles such as Pasha and Bey, while a few even earned the title of Emir (Prince), like the Lutfallah family (Abaza, 2015). There are also countless examples of successful Syrian businesses that started as small and middle-sized food businesses in Cairo at that time and maintained their success for years until the present. Examples include Abo Heider *Shawerma* take away restaurant that started in Korba in Heliopolis during the 60s and is still one of the best and affordable on-the-go Syrian *Shawerma* sandwiches (Fig 10). Another example is Quwaider dessert shop, which is an icon in the dessert industry in Egypt since its inception (Fig 11).

The Syrians of Egypt had an enormous effect not only on the business sector in Egypt, but also on journalism and on the publishing industry. The Syro-Lebanese Takla family established Egypt's most famous newspaper, "Al-Ahram". Syro-Lebanese families dominated the publishing industry by owning major printing houses like Dar al-Hilal (est. 1892), which gave them enormous influence on the country's cultural life. Even Rose al-Youssef, the essential Egyptian cultural figure from the first half of the twentieth century, was originally Syrian (Khoury, 2004). History includes various stories that portrays the harmonious relationship between Egyptians and longtime Syrian residents. However, a major conflict occurred during 1929-1931; where the Egyptian nationalist intellectuals led a revolutionary act against the Syrian journalists in Egypt at that time. Salama Mousa and his colleagues at the New Journal (المجلة الجديدة) had well-defined the difference between the considerable development and leading role of the Syrian born journalists on the Egyptian press versus the importance of having the journalism professional led by Egyptian journalists only. The New Journal contributors argued that the Egyptian journalists should be the ones leading the Egyptian community's public opinion and thoughts through their writing on patriotism, independence and Egyptian culture. They argued that Syrian journalists were only concerned with their personal economic interests. In addition, they claimed that the Egyptian publications were lacking the true Egyptian spirit when produced by non-Egyptians. The fact that this act happened during the economic depression at that time and the unemployment of several Egyptian journalists had helped in the revolt against Syrian journalists (Gershoni, 1987).

## **The Situation of Current Syrian Refugees in Egypt**

The Syrian war in 2011 created a considerable number of refugees that have fled to many countries worldwide. The main four receiving countries are Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

By the end of 2011, Syrian refugees started arriving in Egypt. The major influx, however, arrived in 2012. Around 13,000 Syrians joined the Syrian community in Egypt at that time (UNCHRb, 2014). By the end of 2014, the number of Syrians registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt was around 250,000 (UNHCR, 2014b). Many of them chose Egypt because they have family who had lived in Egypt for a long time. They also favored living in urban settings rather than refugee settings, which Egypt provides (UNHCR, 2012).

Syrians have several choices regarding their legal status in Egypt. They can stay legally in Egypt by four ways. First, they can enter with a tourist visa and then renew it every three to six months. Second, they can apply for a work permit, which is a lengthy and difficult way of obtaining residency in Egypt. Third, they can provide proof of studying or having children enrolled in schools in Egypt. This gives the whole family a temporary state residency based on their children's enrollment in schools. Fourth, they can register as a refugee with the UNCHR. There are many reasons behind the major gap of those who register themselves as refugees in the UNCHR and those who do not. During my interviews, I met only a few Syrians who registered themselves as refugees. Many Syrians do not want to register as asylum seekers with UNHCR to avoid the refugee label, which they perceive as a negative one. They do not see themselves as needy people. On the contrary, many of them feel they are doing well in Egypt. Being a refugee also limits their freedom of traveling outside Egypt and many Syrians hope that they will return to their home country when it is possible.

Since 2011, Syrian refugees' experiences upon arrival in Egypt varied depending on the political situation at the time. The reason for the increase in Syrians arriving in Egypt in 2012 was due to the welcoming reception of President Mohamed Morsi<sup>12</sup> and his official declaration

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<sup>12</sup> Mohamed Morsi was the nominated candidate of Freedom and Justice Party (الحرية والعدالة). This party was established after January 25<sup>th</sup> revolution as the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The party won the

on Syrian refugees in one of his on-air speeches. However, after the change in regime in July 2013, the number of Syrians in Egypt decreased drastically. This is because up until 2013, Syrian refugees did not need visas or any additional paperwork to enter Egypt. However, more recently, visas and paperwork for residency are becoming essential and the state is tightening security measures against Syrians. This is because after 30 June 2013, there was an aggressive media campaign against Syrians following the sit-in in Rabaa square<sup>13</sup> that linked some Syrian refugees to the Muslim Brotherhood. The media referred to Syrians as terrorists and were successful in changing their image among many Egyptians. Syrian refugees in Egypt were bearing the brunt of a sudden wave of racism, in one of the most unexpected side effects of the removal of the ex-president Mohamed Morsi from the Egyptian presidency. At that time, Tawfik Okasha, who is a widely watched and well-regarded Egyptian television host threatened Syrians with his hate speech.<sup>14</sup> Since Morsi's fall, Egypt's new government has turned away hundreds of Syrians from its borders, at times sending whole planes full of refugees back to their airport of origin. At the same time, Syrian refugees started to look for ways to leave Egypt due to the increase of anti-Syrian sentiments in Egyptian streets and in the media, as well as the strict new visa requirements, which have significantly limited the entry of refugees and asylum seekers into Egypt (Beach and Qabbani, 2013). In 2014, UNHCR reports that the situation improved after the moderate political stability experienced in June 2014, when presidential elections took place and President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi won. This is also reflected in the media where for example

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parliamentary elections late 2011. The party mobilized Islamic forces to draft the 2012 constitution and ignored all other liberal forces in Egypt. This led to June 30<sup>th</sup> revolution where Egyptians pushed Mohamed Morsi out of the presidential office.

<sup>13</sup> After taking the presidential office, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) faced accusations of abuse of power. Sporadic clashes continued to take place from time to time between the MB members and anti-Morsi activists before June 30<sup>th</sup>. The MB organized a sit-in in Rabaa al-Adawiya, a square near Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque in Nasr City. The sit-in, which witnessed daily hate speeches against non-Muslims and the Egyptian state and threats of terrorist attacks, was dispersed by the Egyptian police forces in a deadly clash where, 607 of the protestors and around eight police officers lost their lives (Aly & Fakhry, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHpeUmn6Hw>

Mohamed Sobhy, a credited and respected actor and TV presenter, dedicated full episodes named “In Love of Syria”<sup>15</sup> to Syrians in Egypt through his program “مفيش مشكلة خالص” on the CBC Channel. The episodes mainly focused on Syrians’ accomplishments in Egypt after 2011 uprising and then civil war in Syria. Despite the major improvement in the relationship of the Egyptian government and Syrian refugees, some Syrian refugees come to Egypt only for a temporary stay as a transit country until they resettle in a third country. There are flows of Syrians’ irregular migration from Egypt to other countries by the sea. However, there are no official data on the exact number of Syrian refugees leaving the country.

### Current Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey:

In a conference on the status of Syrian refugees, Mr. Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, argued “... the contribution of host countries in protecting refugees is so fundamental that it makes them by far the largest humanitarian donors in the Syrian context...” (UNHCR, 2014a: para 2). His statement in 2014 highlights the fact that the Middle East and North Africa region is currently experiencing increasing instability, with deteriorating humanitarian conditions due to huge displacements taking place across the region because of the Syrian revolution/civil war. The main host countries of Syrian refugees are Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt. Today, these refugees are estimated to be over four million people (UNHCR, 2014a). The following table illustrates the figures of refugees from 2012 until 2014 in all countries.

REFUGEE PLANNING FIGURES						
2014 PLANNING FIGURES (persons – in thousands)						
As of	Total	Egypt	Iraq	Turkey	Jordan	Lebanon
Dec 2012	588,000	13,000	74,000	148,000	168,000	180,000
Dec 2013	2,403,000	145,000	216,000	562,000	575,000	906,000
June 2014	3,252,000	197,500	308,000	781,000	687,000	1,277,000
Dec 2014	4,100,000	250,000	400,000	1,000,000	800,000	1,650,000

Table 1 – Refugee figures in Egypt and the region (Source: UNHCR, 2014b)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOaooS4S6UM>

In general, the refugees' social and economic effects on a host country is a debatable topic. From a human rights perspective-, helping the Syrian refugees is clear cut. However, the controversial effects of this enormous number of refugees fleeing to a host country at the same time, especially a developing one, needs further examination.

It is important to study the situation of a country like Lebanon with 1.6 million registered refugees (UNCHR, 2014c). There are many more unregistered Syrians in Lebanon. Lebanon has become the country with the highest per capita concentration of refugees worldwide. Refugees from Syria now equal almost a quarter of the total six million resident population (UNHCR, 2014c). Syrian refugees in Lebanon do not live in camps; they live in Lebanese neighborhoods. Syrian refugees have been allowed to settle freely across the country. This has led to a spread of informal tented-settlements and refugees seeking shelter in overcrowded, empty or unfinished buildings (" World Bank", 2013). This is unlike Palestinian refugees' status in Lebanon, where they reside in camps. According to UN estimates," there are more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, of which 50% live in twelve camps across the country" (Haddad 2003, 43). They have been in Lebanon since 1948, but do not have any social, economic and political rights that could encourage them to stay in Lebanon. "They are marginalized from mainstream society to encourage their departure elsewhere" (Haddad 2003, 41).

The recent influx of Syrian refugees has had both positive and negative effects on both the Lebanese economy and society. In terms of employment, Syrian refugees in Lebanon have worsened the situation in an already hostile labor market. The IMF has found that Syrian refugees, who work primarily in agriculture, construction, and personal services, are often willing to take significantly lower wages (on average 40 percent lower than their Lebanese counterparts), work without receiving social benefits, and work longer hours than the Lebanese (Jarmuzek, et al., 2013). In total, the Lebanese governments estimates that approximately 60 percent of the national labor force is Syrian (Abou Zeid, 2014). This had a negative effect on the Lebanese labor market especially since there are no official policies that protect Lebanese workers against foreign labor. The increase in the supply of labor brought on by the refugee crisis led to increased unemployment, and a dramatically more difficult labor market for the Lebanese (Masri and Srour, 2013). This is particularly evident in the agriculture sector, where,

according to a UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimate, wages have fallen 60 percent due to Syrian refugees (Curtis et al., 2013).

It is a complicated situation; the Syrian refugees act now as a replacement to Lebanese workers rather than an addition to the Lebanese labor force. Moreover, Syrians' influx has affected poorer Lebanese in the low-skilled and informal labor markets. This is because most of the refugees are employed without a contract (Masri and Srour, 2013). The main reason for the fierce competition between Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens is that most of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are young, poor and unskilled. Lebanon is geographically very close to Syria and thus it is cheaper and easier to travel to than other countries in Europe. It was found that roughly half of the refugees in Lebanon were younger than 18; the same study also found that over 30 percent of refugees are illiterate and 60 percent have not completed primary education (Masri and Srour, 2013). Moreover, Lebanon has a major problem in providing jobs for its educated young citizens commensurate with their skills. Youth unemployment is almost 34 percent and is further exacerbated by the crisis ("World Bank", 2013). Not only the work force, but also the influx of Syrian refugees affected the education sector. The Lebanese Ministry of Education announced in early 2016 that it would accommodate an additional 200,000 students in the public-school system to cope with the increase in refugees (Abi Raad, 2016). As a result, two main problems appeared. There is an educational system language gap between Syrian school students (who studied in Arabic) and Lebanese students (who study in either English or French), which slows down the teaching process. In addition, the increased number of students in the classrooms is a challenging issue for teachers. Moreover, the Lebanese government officially ordered public hospitals to provide health care to Syrian refugees. The increased number of refugees has also put pressure on the Ministry of Public Health, which will cover the vast majority of the cost (85-95 percent) (Dyke, 2014). The World Bank has estimated that it would require nearly half billion dollars to return the Lebanese healthcare system to pre-crisis levels of quality (Dyke, 2014).

Lebanese media have repeatedly criticized the lack of burden-sharing by other countries in the face of an endless crisis. The Syrian refugees are currently seen by some Lebanese as a serious threat to the country's economy, social coherence, and infrastructure. There are various

videos showing Lebanese rejection of Syrian refugees in Lebanon<sup>16</sup>. On the other hand, there are various humanitarian efforts through social media targeted at changing Lebanese's perspectives. One of these is the Facebook page "The Campaign in Support of Syrians Facing Racism"<sup>17</sup>. The page declares that it "rejects all violence towards Syrians [in Lebanon], racist political rhetoric, and the associated media hype". On the other hand, the Syrian refugees' case is not that tensed in Jordan.

Jordan also borders Syria, which in turn has facilitated the influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan since 2011. Before 2011, Jordan experienced robust economic growth in the first decade of the 21st century. However, since 2011, Jordan faced various economic challenges due to the increase of prices worldwide as well as a decrease in cheap fuel supplied by Egypt. The rise in international commodity prices including fuel, have led to deficits in Jordan's current budget (Olwan and Shiyab, 2012).

After the Syrian civil war began, many Syrians escaped to Jordan. The number of Syrian refugees registered or awaiting registration in Jordan reached 800,000 in December 2014. (UNCHR, 2014b). Unlike Lebanon, the Jordanian government officially responded to the ongoing daily arrival of Syrian refugees by setting up refugee camps. In July 2013, the number of refugees in the Zaatari camp was estimated at 144,000, making it the second largest camp in the world and the fourth largest city in Jordan, according to UNHCR data. Moreover, many Palestinians and Iraqis are also registered as refugees, making Jordan the highest ranked country in the world in terms of refugees per capita (Olwan and Shiyab, 2012). Syrians constitute 46 per cent of non-Jordanians living in the Kingdom and 13.2 per cent of the overall population. Jordan's total population is 9.5 million. Yet, the number of Jordanians is around 6.6 million, while the number of non-Jordanians who reside in the country is around 2.9 million, representing 30.6 per cent of overall population (Ghazal, 2016). Not all Syrian refugees in Jordan reside in camps, as some have relatives hosting them. Many others try to escape life in the camps and rent cheap apartments in urban areas. However, this is illegal in Jordan and consequently any Syrian caught outside the camp is returned or even deported.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mUGqKbFF1qk>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/الحملة-الداعمة-للسوريين-بوجه-العنصرية>

The steep influx of Syrian refugees into the country imposed an additional burden on the government in terms of public spending, especially on infrastructure needed to supply the additional demand for electricity, water, and public services. The Jordanian government incurred these additional costs to meet the demand of hosting the substantial number of Syrian refugees on public services, such as education and health care services. The annual cost of having a student enrolled in primary education is approximately US\$877, whereas this number increases to approximately US \$1195 for a student enrolled at the secondary level. This resulted in an additional cost of US\$81.4 million to enroll approximately 78,531 Syrian children in 2013. In addition, the annual cost of providing health care services is approximately US\$874 per patient per year, resulting in an additional total cost of approximately US\$167.8 million for hosting approximately 600,000 Syrian refugees (Fakih & Ibrahim, 2013). The addition of Syrian students to existing schools eventually put pressure on the educational system. The same applies to health care services and many other services provided to the Jordanians.

In addition, due to the lack of work permits given to refugees in Jordan, Syrian refugees tend to work informally for very low wages in sectors such as agriculture and construction. However, this has not affected the job opportunities offered to the Jordanians as the overall official unemployment rate in Jordan has remained steady at 12.9 percent in the first quarter of 2015 compared with 12.2 percent in 2012 (“Government of Jordan Department of Statistics”, 2014). This is because Jordanians do not tend to work in low paying jobs. Consequently, these types of jobs are mainly filled by migrants. Unlike Lebanon, Syrian migrants are not having major social effects on the Jordanians because as mentioned earlier, they reside and work inside the camps outside of Jordanian society. While some Syrians flee the camps, it is almost impossible for them to mingle freely in the country due to the lack of work permits, official residence papers, and the fear of being returned to the camps or deported.

The refugees’ situation in Turkey is also extremely challenging. The number of Syrian refugees in Turkey by the end of 2014 was 1,000,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2014b). Later, in 2017, the total number of Syrian refugees registered in Turkey had reached 3,106,932 (UNHCR, 2017d). Moreover, many more Syrian refugees are not officially registered as they have illegally entered the country. Unregistered Syrians who entered the country illegally mentioned their inability to access public aid and social benefits. Their answer to why they did not register with

the authorities was the fear of being deported or sent to camps (Ayselin, 2016). The recent main challenges to the Turkish government is the extended war in Syria that makes it less likely for Syrian refugees to return to their homeland in the near future. Accordingly, social interconnection and integration is a must. The Turkish government is required to “acknowledge the reality that a significant part of them will no longer want to return back to their country but stay permanently in Turkey thus to develop living-together strategies” (Hugo, 2014: 8).

Syrian refugees are facing many challenges in the labor force in Turkey. Syrians seem to be employed mainly in low-skilled jobs in the construction and service sectors (Dincer et al, 2013). Employment in the informal economy has made them prone to exploitation. Since they are not yet allowed to work under temporary protection status, there are no legal authorities to resort to in case employers do not pay them (Ayselin, 2016). From another viewpoint, the competition exists among Syrian unskilled workers who accept lower wages than their Turkish coworkers for the same job. Second, in addition to the limitation on work permits, Syrians are unable to fit in the Turkish labor market due to the language barrier. Also, the Syrians’ unfamiliarity of the Turkish language prohibits them from attending state schools, which is another limitation to their integration into Turkish society. Third, the rapid increase in refugee numbers in Turkey has led to a higher demand on basic needs and services. This resulted in an increase in prices of food, housing and other basic goods. Increased prices in food and housing is pressuring both Turkish natives as well as Syrian refugees. They are spending a substantial portion of their income on basic goods, even if their wages were adjusted for general constant inflation (Alix-Garcia and Saah, 2010). Fourth, Turkey provides Syrians with the right to access public health services as well as educational services. However, The Turkish government has not been concerned with informing them about their right to access public services. In the absence of institutionalized policies especially for non-camp refugees, their situation is left to the judgement of local authorities, which causes problems with their smooth integration into and acceptance by the host society (Ayselin, 2016). To conclude, Syrian refugees’ existence in Turkey is mainly affecting the prices of the basic goods and services. They are also competing with locals in obtaining unskilled jobs. Yet, the language barrier and the absence of clear governmental policies are creating minimal interaction between the two communities.

## Research Gaps on Syrian Refugees studies in Egypt (Micro-level)

Most current literature on Syrian refugees in Egypt focuses on the examination of refugee needs and an illustration of their statuses in their new host country. More research needs to be done on their profound feelings, effects, and attitudes toward their surrounding work and social environments. Since it is impossible to study the social and economic effect of Syrian refugees in Egypt on a macro level, I am trying to look at it on micro-level through their day-to-day business and social interactions in ElRehab city in Cairo. I believe that the presence of Syrian refugees in ELRehab city in Egypt is unique enough that it deserves further study. In addition, previous research examining Syrians' lives in Egypt does not specifically focus on those who live in ElRehab city. I will be investigating the Egyptian-Syrian economic and social relationship in ElRehab city and what impact this relationship has on the city.

Most of the research done on Syrians' lives in Egypt were conducted by the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CRMS)<sup>18</sup> at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The center does not only study the migrants' and refugees' lives in Egypt, but also provides educational trainings and courses related to the same field. Research done by CRMS were of major benefit in providing me with a clearer picture of migrants' and refugees' status in Egypt prior to fieldwork.

It is important to note that Syrian participants whom I have met in ElRehab city cannot be considered representatives of most Syrians living in Egypt. This is because they -like most of ElRehab residents- belong to the middle and upper middle socioeconomic class (sec)<sup>19</sup>. They are not the typical vulnerable refugees represented in media worldwide. In general, people living and working in ElRehab city have stronger purchasing power when compared to residents of other areas in Egypt. Therefore, Syrians in ElRehab city have a more privileged lifestyle than other

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<sup>18</sup> <http://schools.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> According to the American Psychology Association (APA), the SEC can be measured through various variables such as education, occupation, family size, and other factors (APA, 2007).  
<http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/class/measuring-status.aspx>

neighborhoods in Egypt. The city is secured and all services are available. These conditions make ElRehab city an advantaged place for its residents and visitors. Moreover, this creates a bubble for those who live in ElRehab away from the rest of Cairo.

Further research need to be done on Syrians' perceptions of their quality of life in Egypt in areas other than ElRehab city. According to her interview with the International Business Times, Cherine Hassan, at the UNHCR registration and family unit office in Cairo, said, "Despite the concerns of refugees about their living conditions, Egypt has been very welcoming to Syrian refugees. They have their own schools, they are running businesses, and [the fact that they are] being requested to obtain residency permits during their [stay] in Egypt to legalize their situation doesn't mean that they are not welcomed," she added. "It is a security precaution, given the unstable security situations in the surrounding countries". (Shahine, 2016).

## Chapter Three

### Research Methodology and Sample Structure

#### Background

To answer the above-mentioned questions, the research primarily relies on two qualitative approaches. First, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the targeted groups that I will mention in the table below in details. In addition, I chose the participant-observation method since my research project examines the lifestyle of Syrians in a specific urban area: ElRehab city.

My research uses qualitative methodology. I conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with chosen participants as per the field questions in the appendix section. The conversation was a semi structured one where I started the conversation and then gave the participant the freedom to tell their own story in their own way. I preferred qualitative open-ended questions to let the interviewees express their feelings, emotions, and personal experiences in depth on their day-to-day lives in ElRehab city rather than focusing on the reasons and consequences of the war in Syria and other major political events. I found face-to-face interviews to be very useful in developing a fuller understanding of the interviewees' feelings and lifestyle. After the interviews, I recorded any special body language and/or tone of voice to give added texture to the interviewees' verbal answers. Face-to-face interviews also helped to facilitate an interactive dialogue between the interviewee and me. This sometime led to changing the order of the questions or altering the questions themselves according to the flow of the interview. Despite the interactive nature of the discussion, I tried to be in control of the discussion as per Wengraf (2001: 194) who advised the interviewer: "you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need." All my interviews were audio taped and then later transcribed by myself.

My research focused on ElRehab city. I chose the participant observation methodology because my research is related to urban anthropology. Participant observation is believed to be "a good method for conducting rich ethnography, and has been demonstrated to produce good

results in the works of other urban researchers” (Bernard 2005:346). I spent some time observing people’s behavior in distinct locations in ElRehab city before starting my face-to-face interviews. This helped in formulating the interview questions. It also gave me an insight into the details of daily life that helped during my fieldwork, such as the opening and closing times of the shops, cafes’ peak working hours, walking experience in ElRehab market (السوق), etc. I also consider myself to be a part of the fieldwork. I lived in ElRehab for two years (from 2008 until 2010) and since I left, I visit ElRehab malls and markets (السوق) at least once every week mainly for shopping purposes. This gave me the chance to observe and experience dealing with the community in ElRehab both as an insider and as an outsider.

Concerning the sample structure, there are various Egyptian entrepreneurs in ElRehab city who employ Syrian labors. I believe that spending time with the workers in these different outlets gave some insight into their lives in Egypt. I also met Syrian entrepreneurs who opened their new businesses in ElRehab city. It is useful to get a glimpse of the challenges faced by migrant entrepreneurs in Egypt and their ways of solving them. On the other hand, I interviewed Egyptians working for Syrian entrepreneurs along with Syrians working for Egyptian entrepreneurs. This is vital to frame the full spectrum of Egyptian-Syrian business relationships and its effects on their social interactions. I met real estate brokers in ElRehab to understand the effect of the influx of Syrians on housing rentals and prices in ElRehab. Moreover, Syrian doctors and nurses are currently working in the ElRehab medical service center. I met both Egyptian and Syrian doctors and nurses working there to understand the relationship among them as colleagues and the changes-if any- that Syrian doctors and nurses have on the work dynamics. I interviewed Syrian women who are either living or working in ElRehab city to gain a better understanding of the challenges they face in Egypt as women and the changes that occurred in their lifestyle upon leaving their home country. During my fieldwork, I tried to understand to what extent Syrian refugees are aware of their rights according to Egyptian law and how they are making use of it.

**The sample structure is as follows:**

<b>Egyptians</b>	<b># of interviews</b>	<b>Syrians</b>	<b># of interviews</b>
Specialists (Doctors, Teachers, Nurses, Chefs, Salesmen, Workers, and Hairdressers)	6	Specialists (Doctors, Teachers, Nurses, Chefs, Salesmen, Workers, and Hairdressers)	7
Brokers	3	Business owners	2
Managers	3	Managers	2
Total	23		

As mentioned earlier, my research relies on face-to-face interviews with targeted participants. The entire field process lasted for almost three months. The face-to-face interviews stage started after spending almost one month observing ElRehab city as my field site. My interviews were mainly in ElRehab malls, the ElRehab market (السوق), the two main medical centers in ElRehab city and the streets in-between the buildings.

It is worth mentioning that recently one street of ElRehab market (السوق) became a walking area with no cars or bikes. Most of the shops in this street are Syrian restaurants, Syrian dessert shops, and super markets owned by Syrians. Walking around this street gives the feeling that you are in Syria: the smell of food, the names of the shops, the Arabic accent, and the shops' names almost replicates a Syrian street. The street gave me the impression of a closed Syrian

community. When I tried to interview the owner of a Syrian shop on this street, the workers asked me to wait for a while as he is having his coffee with another Syrian friend, an owner of the dairy products shop, on the same street.

I introduced myself to all my participants as a master's student at The American University in Cairo. I explained that I am studying Syrian migrants' lives in ElRehab city. When I was interviewing Syrian respondents, I avoided mentioning the word "refugee" and replaced it with "migrant" as I have seen full rejection (both verbal and through body language) to the idea of being a refugee. And interestingly, Egyptian participants do not use either words (migrants or refugees) when talking about Syrians or Iraqis or any other nationality living in Egypt. They only distinguish them by their nationality (the Syrian man, the Iraqi man) and not their status. All types of Syrians I met in ElRehab city, whether business owners, employees, or workers, feel that the word "refugee" is an insult and is associated with being very poor and needy while they have the feeling that they are living in their second home country, Egypt. Many participants I met explained their feeling of comfort and safety they experience living in Egypt. Adnan<sup>20</sup>, Syrian worker in the dessert shop, explained that he is living in Egypt, his second home ( احنا ) (عائشين في بلدنا الثانية " مصر ") personal communication, March 29, 2017). Moreover, Alassel, owner of Alassel restaurant mentioned that Egypt and Syria are one country since a long time ago, and thus he is feeling like a citizen living in his own country, Egypt (personal communication, April 10, 2017).

In contrast to my expectations, the fieldwork was quite smooth. I had only one rejection for doing an interview from a broker who had only started working in ELRehab one month ago. Other than that, all the participants approved without focusing too much on the details of my introduction. I also stressed the point that I wanted to record the interview by explaining that the recording would help me to remember the exact wordings of what they say during the interview. None of the participants questioned the recording method and they all seemed to talk freely and

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<sup>20</sup> Adnan is a Syrian sales person in Alloura dessert shop. The shop is owned by Mr Hafez, a Syrian business owner. Adnan has just come to Egypt five months ago. His friends helped him to come to Egypt. Since 2011, he was living and working in Lebanon. He left Lebanon because he was not treated well. In addition, in Lebanon, he was working for 16 hours per day for USD 750. He mentioned that Lebanon is very expensive and he used to pay half of what he earns for his house rent. He is living with his wife only. He was working in Syria in tourism. He described himself as a middle-classed citizen in Syria who used to work and live well.

ignored the recorder (that is bigger than a mobile phone and with a small microphone) during the discussion itself although I held it close to their mouth to have a clear recording. It is worth mentioning that during my field work, I faced no obstacles in conducting interviews with Egyptians and Syrians working in ElRehab city<sup>21</sup>. Females were not insecure when being approached randomly by a female interviewer. And males were respectful when trying to help a female researcher.

Most of the interviews with the Egyptian and Syrian workers or business owners in ElRehab city were conducted in their work place. I either had to wait to interview them during their break or ask them to do a quick fifteen-minute interview. They either had to ask permission from the manager before talking to me or I would wait for their usual break time. I made sure that all the interviewees had no one standing beside or close to them during the discussion in order to talk freely. Concerning the business owners, I met with many of them on the spot in their shops as they manage the work by themselves. Some business owners were not available in the shops all the time and were available only during limited periods. I would re-visit the shop during these timings to ask for a meeting. Overall, I felt that all the participants I interviewed were very cooperative, they talked from the heart with spontaneous answers, gave me their real names, gave examples and details from their personal lives, did not terminate the interview before it ended, and were very friendly. As a participant observer, I also had some casual discussions with residents or workers in ElRehab city while I was walking around the streets, sitting in a café or a restaurant, or while buying something from a shop or a pharmacy.

### **Geographical Layout of ElRehab City in New Cairo:**

My fieldwork focused on ElRehab city and New Cairo as mentioned earlier. ElRehab city is located inside the New Cairo area. It is also connected to most of Cairo's important neighborhoods such as Mokkattem, downtown, Maadi, and others by the Ring Road. New Cairo also includes Elbanafseg area, ElYasmine area, the First Settlement and the Fifth Settlement.

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<sup>21</sup> Interviewers were not asked about their political views or backgrounds for safety issues and due to the sensitivity of the topic in Egypt.

This unique location encouraged many people to move to ElRehab and New Cairo as it is still convenient to live there and work in nearby locations in Cairo (Fig 9: New Cairo Map).

New Cairo was established to absorb the growing needs for new housing in Cairo. Most of Cairo's lands were used to build huge buildings apartments. Accordingly, there existed a sort of saturation inside Cairo city and moving to a new area was the solution. New Cairo and ElRehab has many international and private schools in addition to the campuses of all the main international universities in Egypt, such as The American University in Cairo, The German University in Cairo, The British University in Egypt, and others. This is a marker of New Cairo's targeted residents' socioeconomic status as these schools and universities charge fees that are only affordable by the middle, upper middle, and higher social classes. Families sending their children to these schools and universities are encouraged to move to New Cairo for convenience. The government has not built a metro line to this new city and thus it is a more exclusive area where lower social classes do not have easy access to and would only commute there for the sake of work through buses and minibuses.

Residents in New Cairo have three purchasing options. The first option is that they can buy a piece of land and build their own separate villas or buildings. The second option is to buy an apartment in a building owned by an individual (known as *العمارات الاهلية*). The third option is to buy a house in a compound (a gated community of buildings that may include villas, townhouses, apartments and penthouses).

### **ElRehab City:**

The first established compound in New Cairo was ElRehab city that was built by the Talat Mustafa Group, which is one of the largest real estate developers in Egypt. It is the first city built by the private sector in Egypt that has comprehensive services to cater to all the needs of its residents. It is an area of 10 million m<sup>2</sup> in New Cairo. The city was built in ten phases, each built on an area of 240 feddans (one feddan = 4200 square meters) (Alrehab, 2011). All the services needed are provided throughout the city. Talaat Mostafa Group was owned and managed by Eng. Talat Mostafa when it started in the beginning of the 1990s until 2009 when he went to jail after being accused of hiring a serial killer to murder one of his ex-wives, the Lebanese singer, Suzane Attia, in her apartment in Dubai. The incident was extensively covered

by the media at that time. Talat Mostafa is still in prison and the company has been managed by one of his brothers since then. As per my interview with Mr. Ezz <sup>22</sup>(owner of AlAlamyia real estate brokers office in ElRehab market): “The city changed 180 degrees after Talat Mostafa, God help him (الله يفك ضيقته), his brother is just an image (وجهة), now it is managed by local employees. The management is horrible (ضايعة)” (personal communication, April 18, 2017).

ElRehab is a fully-fledged city where someone can live, work, shop, and have all the services needed in the same place without the need of leaving the area. It started several decades ago with cheaper prices per meter than the nearest neighborhoods, such as Heliopolis and Nasr City to attract more people from middle and upper-middle social classes. It also offered the option of living in a villa or an apartment with a small garden with cheaper prices per meter than Cairo’s nearby neighborhoods at that time. However, after the success of the city in sustaining very good services and after the built up of the surrounding areas known as the First and the Fifth Settlements in New Cairo with very expensive compounds, the prices of ElRehab city increased dramatically in parallel to the increase in New Cairo’s prices in general. Nowadays the price per meter ranges from ten to thirteen thousand Egyptian pounds or more. Also, the rents increased as there is a great demand to live in ElRehab city where all the services are available. In addition, many people who cannot afford to buy in ElRehab or New Cairo prefer to rent a house there. Many people who live outside ElRehab use the services provided in ElRehab as it is not restricted to ElRehab residents.

ElRehab city is a self-sufficient city that caters all its’ resident needs. Concerning education, ElRehab city includes five private schools to meet all the educational requirements of the city’s inhabitants. These are: “The British School”, “The Future School” “The German School”, "Othman Ibn Affan School", and a French School. Concerning health services, ElRehab has three medical centers that are available 24 hours a day. The medical centers operate through various clinics and branches of famous hospitals in Egypt that have a varied range of expert doctors in diversified disciplines available throughout the day.

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<sup>22</sup> Mr Ezz is the owner of AlAlamyia real estate office in ELRehab market. He manages 7-8 salesmen working with him in the office. Mr Ezz is not available in the office all the time. I had to take an appointment to meet him. He has been working in the Real Estate field in ElRehab city for 12 years now.

ElRehab also contains a wide selection of shops to fulfill all the daily shopping and household needs of the city's residents. The shops are divided between two main malls in addition to a big market (السوق). There are more malls and markets that are under construction to cater to the increasing number of residents in ElRehab. Mall 1 has a variety of local brands, a cinema and Ragab son's supermarket (one of the biggest supermarkets in Egypt that caters to the lower middle social classes with cheaper products and a variety of promotions and offers throughout the year). Mall 2 has a Metro supermarket (targeting the upper middle and higher social classes) in addition to a variety of local and international shops and cafes, and a small kid's funfair. ElRehab's market (السوق) includes a wide variety of shops, such as handicrafts, and maintenance facilities, such as car repair, carpentry work, plumbers, construction materials and services. This in addition to a variety of restaurants, cafes, supermarkets, pharmacies, pet shops, toys and party shops, party services, dry clean shops, several types of famous food outlets, and real estate retailers and brokers. In addition, the city accommodates a large sports and social club called ElRehab sports club that has some varied sports facilities to fulfill all sports needs of the city's residents. There also exists the bank zone that has most of the important banks in Egypt such as Al-Ahli National Bank, Commercial International Bank, Arab African Bank, and many others.

Non-residents of ElRehab city can also enter ElRehab and enjoy some facilities there, such as the food court (that includes international chains, such as McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Costa Cafe and Pizza Hut in addition to many local chains, such as Arabiata, Café Supreme and others), the malls, the restaurants, the banks, the hospitals, and other services. ElRehab city has more than 20 entrance gates. Residences of the city can move in and out of the city freely through all the gates. The gates are guarded with automated gates that the city residents can open automatically with their electronic access cards. However, visitors (including workers in ElRehab city) can only access the city through two gates (gate 6 and gate 17). This explains the usual crowd existing around these two gates specifically. Security guards are the ones who open these two gates to the visitors through their access cards. This also explains why most of the public transportation to and from ElRehab city (such as minibuses and buses) have their stops beside gates 6 and 17. Workers also use ElRehab private buses to commute to and from ElRehab. This is actually one of the few compounds that allow non-residents inside it. This is one of the reasons why it is less risky to open a private business in ElRehab city. Clients of

ElRehab malls and markets are not only the large number of residents in ElRehab city, but also all the visitors coming to the city daily for different reasons. On the other hand, not all ElRehab residents admire the option of having outsiders inside the compound all the time. This makes the compound less secure and more crowded from their point of view.

The definition of the socioeconomic class of ElRehab city residents is a contradictory issue. In the beginning, ElRehab targeted middle socioeconomic classes with attractive prices to create a pull to the compound. After several years, the compound proved its success and the prices increased dramatically, attracting higher social classes. Many people moved from nearby cities to ElRehab to shift from an apartment to a villa and enjoy owning a private building with a garden or a pool. At the same time, many owners preferred to rent their houses in ElRehab. At that point, the person renting in ElRehab becomes a resident of ElRehab and enjoys all the advantages and facilities of the owner. As per Mr. Ahmed<sup>23</sup> (senior broker in ElRehab real estate broker office in ElRehab Mall 2): “I have been working as a broker in ElRehab city for 12 years now. The social class is intensively going down. If you come and see the people in ElRehab in the weekends, they get food in pans ( فى الحلل ) and do picnics in the public gardens. ElRehab used to have middle and higher social class before 2011 revolution<sup>24</sup>. Now, the social class of both the residents and the visitors is falling. Excuse me, we are all human beings (كلنا و لاد تسعة), but after the revolution, many people got a lot of money from nowhere” (personal communication, March 23, 2017). To sum up, ElRehab is a huge compound with a variety of social classes and backgrounds. This also works in favor of business owners; the diversification in tastes and choices gives more opportunities to different businesses to succeed in ElRehab city.

One cannot miss the considerable number of cafes in ElRehab city. These are small and medium sized local cafes owned by one or a group of owners. Other than food and drinks, they

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<sup>23</sup> Mr Ahmed is a Senior broker in in ElRehab real estate broker office in ElRehab Mall 2. The office is very luxurious. He has been working in Real Estate in ElRehab city for 7 years now.

<sup>24</sup> On the 25th of January 2011, some activists in Egypt led a protest in Tahrir Square against President Mohamed Hosney Mubarak after 30 years of presidency. Their slogan was “Bread, Freedom, Social Justice”. Millions of Egyptian citizens from different ages, social classes, and backgrounds joined the protest aiming of a better country. They succeeded in stripping off President Mubarak and his corrupted government in 18 days. (“Egyptian revolution of 2011”, nd). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian\\_revolution\\_of\\_2011](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egyptian_revolution_of_2011)

serve shisha (tobacco for smoking in a waterpipe, the main traditional flavor is molasses). Many other shisha flavors have replaced the traditional molasses flavor such as mint, grape, and cantaloupe. As per my interview with Mohamed<sup>25</sup>, the waiters' supervisor in New Look café in ElRehab market (السوق): "I have been working here for 8 years now. The cafes here in ElRehab work 24 hours per day. The peak time is at night. People come to socialize, smoke shisha, and meet friends. In the morning, we have fewer clients. It includes females who come for shisha alone with girlfriends. Most of the clients are ElRehab residents. We are an established name in ElRehab now and we have our regular clients. On Saturday and Sunday mornings, we have many clients from outside ElRehab who come to do their errands in the banks in Elrehab or car check-ups in the market (السوق). They usually wait for their turn here in the cafes. Most of our clients are Egyptians. Syrians like to help each other's businesses (بيحبوا ينفعوا بعض); they go every day to Leno café (he pointed to the opposite café). This is owned by a Syrian guy and all the Syrians come and sit together here at night" (personal communication, March 30, 2017). When Mohamed mentioned Leno café, I remembered my experience that triggered my interest to study the lifestyle of Syrians in ElRehab (Where I randomly chose a café in ElRehab city to have coffee. The café was inhabited by Syrian clients who were astonished of my presence as an Egyptian client in the café at that time!).

Both residents and non-residents of ElRehab make use of the home-delivery service options. One can never miss the number of motorbikes parking in front of all the shops in ElRehab market (السوق) where the motor drivers are waiting to take their turns to deliver the orders either inside or outside ElRehab. The delivery service charge varies from one shop to the other. Delivery charge outside ElRehab city is usually more than inside it.

Although ElRehab- like all the other new compounds in New Cairo- is gated and marketed as a secured place to live in, it has come to my attention that most of the houses have iron gates for their houses doors and windows. As Mr Ezz's explanation: "The security guards are a lot but this is not the problem. The problem is that the security guards are the ones who steal (حاميها حراميها). In the last couple of years, there has been many cases of robberies by the

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<sup>25</sup> Mohamed is an Egyptian young man. He works as a waiter in New Look café in ElRehab city. I was recording the interview with him while he was preparing the orders as he could not leave the work place for a brief time. He has been working for the same café for the past 8 years.

guards themselves or due to the guard's desertion of their duties. Can you believe that the security guards steal clothes from the balconies while they are hanging to dry! ElRehab is supposed to be a compound, but once the doors are opened, it is not a compound. They are now changing the security company for the third time" (personal communication, April 18, 2017).

ELRehab was also a center of attraction to many other migrants to Egypt before 2011, such as Iraqis, Libyans, and Yemenis. Many foreigner students from different nationalities choose to live in ElRehab as it is close to many schools and universities as mentioned earlier. In addition, the foreign employees in companies and schools usually come and live in ElRehab. The German University in Cairo and the Future University in Cairo have bought some whole buildings to offer them to their employees. It came to my attention when they put their own logos at the entrance of these buildings.

Since 2011, a vast number of Syrians who escaped to Egypt from the war in Syria have come to live in ElRehab. Many Syrian families have rented or bought different types of houses in Elrehab. The Syrians currently have different occupations inside ElRehab: they are workers, entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers, technicians, carpenters, and many other occupations. I ask the Syrian interviewees in my fieldwork about the reasons that made them choose to live or work inside ElRehab. Before the Syrians' arrival, many Iraqis had opened small business as well in ElRehab. However, their number is diminishing. The most famous one is the Iraqi bakery. Mr Karam<sup>26</sup>, an Iraqi man who manages the Iraqi bakery named Degla Bakeries (افران دجلة), explained to me: "I am the owner's cousin. He is also Iraqi. The shop here started in 2009. He was famous for Iraqi bread in addition to other bakeries. Honestly, after the arrival of the Syrians to ElRehab the work decreased (الشغل قل). Now I had to decrease my prices and offer additional products due to the competition. Also, the shop's initial owner who is Egyptian increased the shop's rent" (personal communication, April 24, 2017). Syrians' new businesses in ElRehab has

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<sup>26</sup> Mr Karam is Iraqi. He is the manager of very famous bakery shop in ElRehab city called Degla Bakeries (افران دجلة). He came to Egypt by the end of 2010 after Iraq's war. He had his masters degree from Alexandria University in Egypt 20 years ago. He returned to Iraq after earning his degree to work but left his country in 2010 due to the war. He is married to an Egyptian woman. It is worth mentioning that he is the only participant I met during my field work who asked me to buy something from his shop after I finished my interview.

not only intensified the competition among Egyptian businesses, but also among other nationalities that were successful previously.

ElRehab city became an attractive place for Syrians to live and work for several reasons. It is a closed compound where one can work and live without the need of going out a lot. Consequently, Syrians living and working in ElRehab city do not need to buy a car, as explained by Mr. Ahmed (senior broker in ElRehab real estate broker office in ElRehab Mall 2): “Syrians start their own businesses first, then buy a house, then buy a car.... We Egyptians do the opposite; we buy a car, then a house then think of opening a private business” (personal communication, March 23, 2017). Many Syrians were encouraged to open their own business in ElRehab city as it has a diversified group of nationalities, backgrounds and social classes, which reflect different tastes. This helps in having successful businesses with the ability to provide different products and services in the same place. Residents of ElRehab city mainly belong to the middle or upper social classes and thus they can afford to buy a variety of luxurious products. Non-residents of ElRehab city also buy from ElRehab markets. This also makes it less risky for Syrians to open their business there due to the huge demand. Syrians who came before the war have also settled in ElRehab city so they directed their friends and families to rent or buy there. ElRehab now has a stable Syrian community that acts as a support system to each other during good and tough times.

It’s essential to study the relationship between Syrian refugees and the Egyptian’s state to better understand how they legalize their stay in Egypt. It is a fundamental factor that affects their integration within the Egyptian community in ElRehab city.

## Chapter Four: Syrians and the State

### UNHCR Benefits

The Egyptian government does not have its own asylum system. As mentioned earlier, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) supervises the asylum seekers' procedures in Egypt that are processed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The role of the UNHCR for more than 60 years is to receive, interview, and register asylum seekers for refugee status declaration. Once registered at the UNHCR, the asylum seekers receive the yellow card, which enables them to stay in Egypt under the protection of the UNHCR. Moreover, the UNHCR yellow card gives benefits for asylum seekers. It helps the asylum seekers to legally interact with Egyptian authorities. Thus, this protects them from being returned to Syria. Also, it enables them to obtain a temporary residency permit in Egypt. The yellow card also supports dealing with the Egyptian authorities to enroll children in public schools and to receive subsidized healthcare and psychological support from UNHCR partner clinics (UNHCR, 2016). Moreover, holders of the yellow card are eligible for food vouchers and financial assistance. Om Hamed, an old aged Syrian woman selling Syrian dessert plates in ElRehab city, mentioned that UNHCR monthly allowance is LE 300 per family. Adnan, the Syrian worker in the dessert shop, mentioned the same amount as Om Hamed. But he said that UNHCR give priorities to families who have kids. Faten<sup>27</sup>, the cook in ElZahraa organization, said: "I have a yellow card that I renew every 18 months. I used to take food vouchers, but they didn't give us any vouchers in the last two years due to the increased

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<sup>27</sup> Faten is a Syrian cook at ElZahraa organization. She is 46 years old. She remembers the date of her arrival to Egypt with her husband and three daughters (05/05/2013). She came from Syria to Lebanon first and then to Egypt. Her last destination was planned to be Libya because her husband worked there before. But, she got stuck in Egypt as she found out that the situation is worse in Libya. At the beginning, she came to her Syrian Aunt who is married to an Egyptian man in Egypt. She had a very difficult situation as she was pregnant at the beginning of the war and she had to wait at her family's house to give birth before she fled Syria. During the war, she was unable to reach her house to get her personal belongings. So, she borrowed money to be able to travel. She was a housewife in Syria and her husband was a plumber. He is 55 years old and is not able to work hard as before. So, she started working for the first time in her life to support the family.

number of Syrian refugees in Egypt. The voucher is for only 300 pounds per month from the Carrefour Hypermarket” (personal communication, April 5, 2017).

This is a temporary state until a refugee status determination (RSD) interview is scheduled to determine their eligibility for refugee status. The duration between receiving the yellow card and the RSD interview varies from one person to the other and usually takes a long time, especially with the influx of an enormous number of refugees to a country at the same time. AbdelRahman<sup>28</sup>, the manager of Ibn ElSham restaurant in ERehab city confirmed this fact: “I have had the yellow card since 2013 and if they call us to the interview, I will go” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Then once refugee status is granted, the asylum seeker receives the blue card and becomes a recognized refugee. The blue card holder is a recognized refugee who is given UNCHR refugee benefits that includes legal integration in Egypt, voluntary repatriation to their country of origin, or resettlement to a third country (UNHCR, 2016).

### **Refugees’ challenges with the UNHCR:**

If the refugee is not accepted in the RSD interview, s/he can register for a second interview, but if s/he is rejected after the second interview, the file is considered closed by UNHCR. A “closed file” means that this refugee is not protected by the UNHCR and should leave Egypt. However, refugees with closed files in Egypt continue to live irregularly. Both the UNHCR yellow and blue card do not grant residence in Egypt. Once the refugees receive the blue card, they must register with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to get their card stamped with the residence permit. The residency permit should be renewed every six months (Badawy, 2008).

Despite all the benefits offered by the UNHCR for Syrians, many of the Syrians I met during my field work were reluctant to register themselves as asylum seekers. It is perceived by them as a non-prestigious status that implies being poor and needy while this is not the case of the

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<sup>28</sup> AbdelRahman is a Syrian man. He is the general manager of a famous restaurant in ElRehab city called “Ibn ElSham”. The restaurant offers Syrian food as grilled meat and chicken, Shawerma, Syrian appetizers, and side dishes. Fig.(13) shows the restaurant’s menu. AbdelRahman came to Egypt five years ago. He used to own his own restaurant in Syria that served the same type of food. When he came to Egypt, he worked as a general manager in Ibn ElSham restaurant as the Syrian owner is his friend.

Syrian participants I met in ElRehab city. Mahmoud<sup>29</sup>, a Syrian nurse in ElRehab medical center said, “I don’t need the yellow card, I have my own papers and so I don’t need it and I am capable of working.....I wouldn’t ever accept the status of a refugee because that means I won’t be able to go back home if Syria is stable again” (personal communication, April 12, 2017). Even those who got the yellow card, do not take advantage of all of its benefits. Mr Karam, an Iraqi man who manages the Iraqi bakery named Degla Bakeries (افران دجلة) said “I have the yellow card but I don’t benefit from it, I once went to UN and they refused to allow me in because I have to take an appointment by phone and they never answer the phone!” (personal communication, April 24, 2017). Om Hamed, an old aged Syrian woman selling Syrian dessert plates in ElRehab city, said that she has the yellow card but she is not taking the monthly subsidy. She explained that due to the influx of a considerable number of refugees at the same time to Egypt since 2011, UNHCR was pressured and stopped giving food subsidies.

### **Refugees’ legal status in Egypt: 1951- 2012**

Egypt has contributed in the drafting of the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees. Egypt agreed to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol but made reservations to Articles 12(1), 20, 22(1), 23 and 24, which guarantee refugees’ equal treatment with nationals regarding personal status laws, social services, housing, education, social security and welfare, and some labor laws (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). Therefore, refugees have limited access to most state social services and the labor market.

As stated earlier, Egypt does not have an established refugee system. Badawy (2015) discusses Article 5 of the Constitutional Declaration of February 1953 as the first explicit reference to refugees in a constitutional document to the right of asylum in Egypt. This was repeated in Article 53 of the 1971 Convention. The suspended Egyptian Constitution of the year 2012 also states the importance of the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, with an addition of Article 57 that forbids the repatriation of political refugees. The current Egyptian

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<sup>29</sup> Mahmoud is a Syrian nurse in ElRehab medical center. He came to Egypt just after 2011 war. His degree is a medical sciences specialization in anesthesia but this specialization is not found in Egypt. He came to Egypt alone in the beginning and then brought his parents two years later. He has just got married a year ago to a Syrian woman he met in Egypt.

constitution passed in 2014 includes Article 91 that requires granting refugees' status to those subjected to persecution.

Although the Egyptian Government has several initiatives to legalize refugee status in Egypt, there are still various restrictions on their lives. On one hand, for the sake of helping the UNHCR to be more efficient, Egypt had established a permanent committee through a Presidential Decree in 1984 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) to review asylum applications. Yet this is still the responsibility of the UNHCR under the supervision of the MOU (Al-Ash'aal, 1992). Furthermore, the Egyptian Minister of Education issued Ministerial Decree No. 24 in 1992, allowing the children of Sudanese, Libyan, and Jordanian asylum seekers to attend public schools (Badawy, 2008). On the other hand, the Egyptian government prevented foreigners from owning land in Egypt. This was decreed under Laws 104 and 124 of 1958, although Palestinians are considered an exception to this, under Law 15 of 1963 (Badawy, 2008). Additionally, Egyptian nationality is given only on basis of descent and not to children of foreigners born in Egypt. This was decreed under Law 154 of 2004 (Badawy, 2008). And finally, concerning foreigners' work permits, article 11 of Ministerial Resolution 390 of 1982, issued by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration in Egypt, necessitates proof from the employer that no Egyptian national is available to do the work before permits may be issued (Library of Congress, 2015). Surprisingly, none of the Syrians I met during my fieldwork mentioned the work permits issue as a problem faced in Egypt. This is because most of them work informally.

### **Refugees' legal status in Egypt: 2012- 2013**

Until 2012, refugees from all Arab countries did not need a prior-to-arrival visa to enter Egypt. They received a tourist visa at the airport upon arrival and could stay in Egypt as tourists for three months. If they wish to extend their visit, they had to legalize their stay in the country through the Department of Immigration at the Ministry of Interior Affairs. This is called the open-door policy. Many Syrian refugees have entered Egypt via a tourist visa. I met Nour<sup>30</sup>, an

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<sup>30</sup> Nour is a Syrian administrator at the medical center in ElRehab city. She came to Egypt before 2011 war for a summer vacation. The war started when they were in Egypt and since then they are staying in Egypt. Her family in Syrian were able to send them some of their personal belongings from Syria. Her family in Egypt includes her parents and six sisters. One of them is married to a Syrian man and is living with him in Saudi Arabia. The other five girls are in different school grades and the family's residency is based on her sisters' school enrollment. Her father

administrator at the medical center in ElRehab city, who came to Egypt with her family just before the war for tourism. As per her tale, “it is a very weird coincident, we rented a house in ElRehab city in 2011 for one month<sup>31</sup> to enjoy our summer vacation in Egypt, we are still living in it until now!” (personal communication, March 26, 2017). The war started when Nour and her family were in Egypt. Since then, they were unable to return to their home country.

On June 30, 2012, Egypt’s then president Mohamed Morsi, announced in his speech at Cairo University his promise to grant Syrian refugees in Egypt full access to public services, such as free health care and education, despite Egypt’s reservations to the 1951 convention. He stated that, “We, as Egyptians, always support the people to obtain their freedom, their self-determination, and self-governing rights. These are general principles that all the people in the world believe in. Today, Egypt supports the Palestinian people and also the Syrian people. The shedding of the Syrian people’s blood must stop. We will do our best to stop the bloodshed in the near future” (IkhwanWeb, 2012). Moreover, in his speech at the League of Arab States in September 2012, Morsi announced Syrian refugees’ right to access public Egyptian schools, stating that “Syrian students will be treated like Egyptian students” (El Dabh, 2012). However, Syrian refugees’ situation changed sharply with the change of the regime in June 30, 2013 where the president, Mohamed Morsi was removed from power. Syrians at that time were associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This was enhanced with the speech by former president Mohamed Morsi in which he expressed full support for the Free Syrian Army and announced the closure of the Syrian Embassy in Egypt. He called on Egyptians to join the Syrians in their fight against the Assad regime. After June 30, 2013, the government claimed that Syrians had contributed to the deterioration of the security situation in Egypt with the dispersion of the Muslim Brotherhood’s sit-in and their participation in protests and violence after his removal. This image was highly supported by the media at that time. Consequently, the Egyptian government started restricting the number of Syrian refugees in Egypt by imposing a visa

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was a restaurant owner in Syria. He opened a restaurant in Egypt but closed it as he was not making much profit because the restaurant was not in a commercial place as ElRehab city. He is now trying to open a restaurant in ElRehab city. She is sharing in her family’s monthly expenses.

<sup>31</sup> Some tourists coming from Arab countries stay for the whole summer in Egypt. They usually rent apartments for their summer vacation (from 1-3 months). During this time, they may travel for a while to summer resorts in Egypt as Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurgada where they stay in hotels there.

requirement on Syrians entering Egypt. This has worsened the Syrians' legal status. At the same time, many Syrian refugees were quick to register with UNHCR to make sure their status was documented, after the relaxed attitude towards registration in 2012 (Kingsley, 2013). Egyptian Authorities have placed Syrians refugees under security scrutiny and there have been incidents of Syrians being arrested, detained, and deported for not having a valid residency ("Egypt: Syria Refugees Detained, Coerced to Return", 2013). Accordingly, Syrians were discouraged to come to Egypt. Towards the end of 2013, the number of refugees coming into Egypt decreased, with many apparently going to Lebanon and Jordan, where there were still no visa requirements (Gulhane, 2013).

### **Refugees' legal status in Egypt: 2014-present**

In 2014, UNHCR reported that the situation improved after the moderate political stability experienced when presidential elections were held and President Abdel-Fattah Al-Sisi was elected. Alternatively, due to increased security threats, there are increased visa restrictions on refugees (UNHCR, 2015a). Also by the end of 2014, due to government subsidy reduction, decreased household purchasing power and increased costs like transportation, many Syrians faced greater economic pressures. Consequently, there was more irregular migration by sea during that year. Some refugees were released and some were resettled to a third country. In 2015, the irregular migration by sea was on the rise for Syrian refugees in Egypt. Egypt became more of a transit country rather than final destination for Syrian refugees but there were no official statistics on the exact number departing the country (Rollins, 2015). When I met Fayez, the Syrian sales person in a perfume shop in ElRehab city, he said: "Frankly if a person wants to come here to Egypt and bring his family, he should open his own business and not work as an employee. Prices are too high here and so you will not be able to bring your family to the unknown. My salary is now very good and I am stable but I won't bring my family unless I have my own business" (personal communication, April 27, 2017). Mahmoud, the nurse in the medical center shared the same point of view. He said that he came to Egypt alone in the beginning. After getting a stable job and arranging a "decent house", he brought his parents from Syria (personal communication, April 12, 2017). For Fayez, Egypt is a transit because he is going to look for a graduate scholarship outside Egypt. He explained that he wants to travel because "In Egypt, I don't expect to work with my IT degree. I see colleagues working in Vodafone and these jobs are for Egyptians only. I hope to

receive a MA study grant and so I can both study and work abroad. I leave that for time, but if my conditions improved here I would stay". Currently, despite all the difficulties that Syrian refugees face in Egypt aligned with the increase in the cost of living, especially after the devaluation<sup>32</sup> of the Egyptian pound that led to a significant increase in prices, many Syrian participants said that they are happy to live in Egypt. There are various ministries that cooperate with the UNHCR in Egypt. These include the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ministry of Foreign affairs (MoFA), the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS), and the Ministry of Health (MoH)). A latest news piece published in December 2015 described a collaboration between the Egyptian National Post Organization (ENPO) to distribute financial assistance to Syrians throughout different post offices in Egypt (Alaa El-Din, 2015).

### **Syrians' education in Egypt:**

Many of the participants I met mentioned that they had no difficulties with accessing public schools<sup>33</sup> and universities in Egypt, but they have many concerns related to the quality of public education. In fact, many of the participants explained that they do not feel the urge to register themselves with the UNHCR because they already have their residency based on either their own or a family member's school in Egypt. None of the Syrian interviewers claimed any complications in their accessibility to public schools and universities. This has been constant under different ruling regimes in Egypt since 2011 until the present.

Most of the participants have complaints regarding the educational system in Egypt. However, this is a general, widespread public issue that is associated with the context of the educational situation in Egypt, where there are grave challenges for all students regarding accessibility, quality of education, overcrowded classes, and inadequate school facilities (Nassar, 2008: 3 & 14). Like Egyptians, accessing public schools is very cheap for Syrians, yet there are

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<sup>32</sup> In November 2016, Egypt's central bank floated the Egyptian pound "in an attempt to stabilize its economy, which has been hampered by a shortage of dollars.... The currency was initially devalued by 32.3% to about 13 pounds per dollar, down from the previous peg of 8.8 per dollar" (Holodny, 2016: np).

<sup>33</sup> Public schools in Egypt are offered for free for Egyptians and currently for Syrian refugees as well. This is applied to all educational levels (primary, preparatory, and secondary). Public schools in Egypt are offering poor quality of education due to the increasing number of students per class (that sometimes reach 100 students), substandard curriculum, and untrained teachers. This has led to escalating the importance of private tutors. Egyptian parents spend more than 60% of education expenditures on private lessons. ("Education in Egypt", np).

many indirect expenses. First, all students in public schools who can afford it depend on private lessons to understand the curriculum and prepare for the exams. This is an enormous financial burden on Egyptian and Syrian families who have their children enrolled in public schools in Egypt. Even students in private schools in Egypt rely on private lessons. Second, as per Faten, a cook at El Zahraa organization near ElRehab, says: “the Syrians’ residency that is granted based on schooling in Egypt should be renewed yearly. It is easy to do that but it costs LE 2500 to renew it every year. This year I am also facing additional challenge; I need to renew my passport to renew the residency in Egypt. This will cost 400 US dollars, and if I don’t renew it, my girls won’t go to school” (personal communication, April 5, 2017).

Many of the Syrians I met showed extreme frustration regarding the quality of education provided in national schools in Egypt. They mentioned that there is an enormous difference between the Egyptian and Syrian curricula, explaining that they feel that their kids were better educated in national schools in Syria. As mentioned by AbdelAlRahman, the owner and manager of Ibn ElSham restaurant in ElRehab city: “My children were top of their class when they were in Syria. When they came here they had to go to a public school and they didn’t understand anything and so I had to move them to a private one, but they are still registered in the public school so we don’t lose our residency”. He added that “They are taking the same curriculum in the private schools but they are taught by private Syrian tutors” to help them understand (personal communication, March 6, 2017). This seems to be a trend as Faten, a cook at El Zahraa organization near ElRehab had a similar situation. She has enrolled her three daughters in public schools in Egypt but was astonished with the lack of quality of education in addition to the lower social class of her kids’ peers. She described them as sons of gatekeepers (اولاد بوابين). She started working and thought she would have a chance to move her kids to private schools for a better education and social class, but she said sadly that: “I found out that I cannot cope with the private school as I pay for the school fees as well as for the private lessons together and so I returned them to public schools and all the money is going to the private lessons” (personal communication, April 5, 2017). However, Syrians who could afford to pay for private schools did not hesitate to leave the public schools as per Hanaa<sup>34</sup>, a cook at ElZahraa organization near ElRehab, “I registered my

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<sup>34</sup> Hanaa is a Syrian woman. She works as a cook in ElZahraa organization. She came to Egypt with her son (17 years old) just after the war started. She had a sister who arrived in Egypt before her. However, her sister left Egypt

only son in a private school because my son didn't like the public schools here. However, he feels the financial burden I am facing as his father does not work and I am the only one working in the house. He is thinking of starting to work once obtaining his high school degree" (personal communication, April 6, 2017).

### **Syrians' health care services in Egypt:**

The Ministry of Health also issued a decree allowing for access for primary health care for Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2015a). Still, support for secondary healthcare and life-saving interventions were still needed. Additionally, not all refugees could afford paying for health treatment. They must show either their yellow or blue card to have access to health care services at national rates. However, these health benefits are not clear to many of the Syrian participants. As in education, there was no notable change in the health care services offered to Syrians through various ruling regimes in Egypt. Hanaa, the cook at ElZahraa organization near ElRehab said: "I didn't know that we have the right for public health services and we haven't needed that so far. There is a hospital here in the charity that give us discounted prices and they helped us get an operation for my dad" (personal communication, April 6, 2017). I had this information confirmed from Ms. Amina<sup>35</sup>, a manager of ElZahraa organization: "We are trying to help our Syrian workers and we get discounts from doctors in case of any health issue they face." However, she did not mention any interaction with public hospitals in Egypt. She added, "We provide our workers with medical services from the volunteer doctors who support our organization to compensate for our low salaries (personal communication, April 6, 2017).

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to Turkey with her kids because she did not like her life in Egypt. Hanaa has a third sister who lived all the war in Syria and is planning to come to Egypt soon. Hanaa came with her son alone in the beginning and then her husband and father followed them. Her husband had an accident in Syria and cannot work. She is financially responsible for her family alone in Egypt now.

<sup>35</sup> Ms Amina is the manager of ElZahraa organization in New Cairo. She is an Egyptian woman who has been working with the organization for 20 years. ElZahraa is a nonprofit organization that has different branches in Egypt. One of the organization's targets is to help female refugees in Egypt to have a steady income by offering them full time and part time jobs. They mainly produce pre-cooked food, handmade bed sheets, and carpets. For more information about the organization, please check their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/GamiatAlzahraa/>. (Fig 12) shows one of the organization's flyers.

## Syrians' Recommended Solutions:

During my field work, many Syrian participants suggested several solutions to their problems with the Egyptian state. Most of the solutions revolved around the idea of facilitating their residency in Egypt or facilitating the process of bringing in the rest of their families from Syria. They believe that this is the key of solving most of their current problems in Egypt. Faten explained sadly that she needs USD 3000 to get her aunt to Egypt from Syria.” How can I get her? I don't have all this money”, she said. Faten, the cook at ElZahraa near ElRehab suggested that the government “shouldn't insist on renewing the residency and having a valid passport to re-enroll children each year in the school”. She said that she is striving and spending most of the family income on private lessons to educate her three kids. She believes that education is their way to have better jobs and get independent. The residency issues “makes us feel alienated over our own alienation (حاسين فوق الغربية غريبة). We are Arabs, don't be afraid of us.”. (personal communication, April 5, 2017). The residency problems are also affecting the Syrians' performance at work; As per AlAssel, the owner of AlAssel shop in ElRehab city: “The problem is that- for my workers- they get six months of residency; two of which are consumed in application and two months are consumed for actual validity and the other two months are hindered in the renewal process and so it is always a problem. I want the Egyptian government to facilitate the papers for Syrians, they took one of my workers for four days and then returned him. I wish only if they put some fees on the papers and we would pay them but I don't want the work to stop.” AlAssel added that “If a Syrian worker does not have a yellow card, I help him to issue it to have legal papers and cause me no harm. I suggest that the Egyptian government would facilitate work permits for Syrian. If this happened, no one will seek the United Nations.” AlAssel also explained that Egypt is losing a high tier caliber of Syrian refugees as business owners and merchants who avoid settling in Egypt due to the complicated residency procedures. He said, “Five thousand of the biggest merchants in Syria found it difficult to come to Egypt because of the paper work so they went to Turkey. If you make things easier all Syrians would like to come and work in Egypt”(personal communication, April 10, 2017). The lack of legal residency also is a barrier to day-to-day problem solving. Mr. Karam, an Iraqi who manages the Iraqi bakery named Degla Bakeries (افران دجلة), explained that he was unable to receive the money sent from his family in Iraq through Western Union because he does not have residency in Egypt.

Other than residency issues, some participants suggested having the right to import products to Egypt from Syria as it has a high market potential. Adnan, the Syrian worker in the dessert shop said, “We need to be able to import things that we need here like Grape molasses (دبس العنب) which we eat with bread. Also, green almond is a very good product that we can bring from Syria and sell here”. (personal communication, March 29, 2017).

Furthermore, I found Syrians have a lack of information regarding their rights in Egypt. For example, most of the Syrians I met do not know that they have access to public health care services. In addition, they have conflicting information regarding the benefits of the yellow card; they do not know the exact monthly allowance per person and whether it is given as cash or as vouchers. Some of them stated that they are aware of the allowance but the UNHCR is not giving it to many yellow cards’ holders. Fayez, sales person at the perfume shop in ElRehab mall mentioned that he “entered with his passport as a student and he did not apply for UNHCR yellow card as he won’t benefit from it because they give money to families only not to students”, information that is not based on any UNHCR official announcement. (personal communication, April 27, 2017). This lack of communicating information effectively might be a reason for Syrians not to register themselves in the UNHCR. This also may hinder their integration into Egyptian society, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter Five:

### Syrian Refugees and Society in EIRehab city

#### Definition of Integration

Migrants' and refugees' integration in the new host country (where they were resettled) is a significant concept that many scholars try to define. The concept of integration is derived from the Latin word 'integer' which means untouched or whole (Maagero & Simonsen, 2005, 147). According to Spenser (2003, 6), 'Integration is not simply about access to the labor market and services, or about changing attitudes or civic engagements; it is a two-way process of adaption by migrants and the host society at all of those levels.' There have been differences on "whether the focus of integration should be foreigners or ethnic minorities, whether the preference should be towards securing accessibility to the labor market or cultural adaption of the new society, whether the discrete cultures of the migrant are a barricade to be swamped or a contribution to be greeted, and whether gauging ethnic differences fortifies the very barrier that we are trying to overcome or is an important apparatus in remitting equality" (Spenser, 2003: 7). The key step in integration "is to make sure that both of the parties that are involved agree on sharing things that they have in common. This is how people join in diversity to form a new society. The most common aspect is to put together all the cultural, social and economic heterogeneities to make a common legacy. Integration is in a way a very cryptic concept because it can ascribe both to the absorption of new members and to the forces of internal adherence with the wider social unit"(Baubock et. al., 1996: 10).

Valtonen (2012) has defined integration as a goal oriented dimension of settlement which points out that migrants are looking for full participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life within a society, a process which goes hand in hand with the concept of retention of their culture of origin, identity and important aspects of their culture. So, integration is the involvement of the migrants in the political, economic and social life of the majority or the mainstream society of a host country. From a societal perspective, it is important that the institutions are accessible or available for all members of the society and the process of admittance of the newest member of the society should be flexible.

As mentioned earlier, I will be studying in this chapter the social and economic integration of Syrians in ElRehab city. During my field work, I have encountered the immense social and economic incorporation of Egyptians and Syrians working and living together in ElRehab city. It is worth mentioning that Syrians in ElRehab city have a unique presence when compared with other refugees or migrants who live in ElRehab city. There are a notable number of Syrians in the streets, shops, and malls. Also, many Syrians either own shops in ElRehab malls and markets or work in Egyptian or Syrian owned shops.

### **Social and Economic Integration in ElRehab City**

Social integration can be described as a process where refugees or migrants and members of any host country follow to achieve peaceful social relations. According to Rainer Strobl, as quoted in Ritzer (2007, 4429), “social integration refers to elements in a social system. The term social system is used in a broad sense here. It describes a social unit with a relatively stable order that establishes a border between itself and its environment. In this sense groups, organizations or even whole nation states are examples of a social system. The term social integration connotes the relationship between people in a society. It refers to social harmony, how people live and organize themselves in a community”. Social integration can be illustrated as “fitting together”, which “suggests that all members and groups of a community are closely related to form one unity of interests. Unlike social integration, social exclusion or disintegration refers to a situation where a person or a group of people does not fit in the mainstream of the society. In other words, social disintegration or exclusion of a group of persons from the mainstream of society is just the opposite of social integration. Clearly, both mainstream and minority interests need to be accommodated and require a delicate balance” (Baubock et. al 1996, 275).

Landecker has tried to portray four types of social integration. “First, cultural integration; is the degree to which cultural standards are mutually consistent. Second, normative integration; is the degree to which the conduct of individuals conforms to the cultural standards of the group. Third, communicative integration; is the degree to which the members of the groups are linked to one another by exchange of meanings. And finally, functional integration; is the degree to which they are linked to one another by exchange of services” (Landecker 1951 quoted in Kaladjahi 1997, 116). During the field work, I interviewed Syrian participants in different contexts, some of them were working and others were shopping or just spending some time with friends or family.

They all seemed to be at ease with their lives in Egypt. They agreed that Egypt is a better option for them than other countries. This is because the cost of living is relatively cheaper than neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Jordan. Adnan, the Syrian worker in the dessert shop felt that “Egyptians are kind people and they welcome us here in their country. They don’t complain or treat other refugees bad; I saw them treating Sudanese refugees well too and not only us” (personal communication, March 29, 2017). He added that he used to live in Lebanon before coming to Egypt but he was mistreated. He believes that the “Lebanese don’t treat Syrians well because their income is too limited and the land is small.” In addition, many of the Syrian participants who have children are relieved to be living in Egypt. This is due to the common customs and traditions between Syrians and Egyptians. Faten, the cook at ElZahraa organization, confirmed the fact that she is not thinking of re-settling to another country because she has three daughters and she wants them to grow in a culture that is close to Syrian culture. She said, “My husband wanted to immigrate to Germany but I refused completely. I have three girls; how can I go to a country with different traditions” (personal communication, April 5, 2017).

“Social integration is not successful if migrants are working but leading parallel lives, with little social contact or civic engagement in the vast community” (Spenser, 2003, 7). Social integration is a whole; it involves all the aspects of the social life. Migrants and minority groups must feel they really belong to the community. During the fieldwork, I received two contradicting opinions. On one hand, I had the feeling from some of the Egyptian participants that Syrians tend to have a closed community within ElRehab city—in terms of staying in the same neighborhoods, having only Syrian friends, and limiting their usage to Syrian outlets. Mohamed, a waiters’ supervisor in New Look Café in ElRehab market (السوق) mentioned, “Syrians usually go to Syrian cafes and restaurants. They usually go to the café just in front of us owned by a Syrian man”(personal communication, March 30, 2017). On the other hand, the Syrians whom I met in the field claimed full integration with Egyptians in ElRehab city. The same idea was confirmed by Adnan, the Syrian worker in the dessert shop, who stated, “both Syrians and Egyptians buy what is of a decent quality for themselves. They do not care much who is the one who produced it” (personal communication, March 29, 2017). In addition, Adly<sup>36</sup>, the Egyptian doctor in ElRehab

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<sup>36</sup> Adly is an Egyptian doctor in ElRehab medical center. He is managing one of the emergency departments. He has been working in ElRehab center for the past 6 years.

medical center, agreed that “The patients’ choice of the doctor depends only whether he is skillful or not. Syrians doctors are trying to appeal to Egyptian clients. Syrians’ medical studies is in Arabic language but their post-graduate studies are done in English. Syrian doctors are learning the terminologies we use fast.” He added that competition is everywhere and in all fields and “this is life” (personal communication, March 16, 2017). Aya<sup>37</sup>, an Egyptian nurse at the medical center in ElRehab city believes that Syrian doctors are learning from Egyptian doctors to improve. She explained that Syrian doctors learn in Arabic while Egyptian doctors learn in English. Therefore, Egyptian doctors are more up to date with international medical practices (personal communication, April 28, 2017). Fayez, the Syrian salesperson in the perfume shop tried to explain the fusion. He said, “This perfume company is Syrian and all of those working here are Syrians. However, the manager is Egyptian. The mix between Egyptians and Syrians is important, to succeed here because Egyptian managers understand the mentality better and they understand the language of the people and so we learn from one another” (personal communication, April 27, 2017). Some of the Egyptian managers I met were aware of the importance of the integration of Syrians and Egyptians coworkers. They believed that there should be a positive spirit within the working environment. Ms Amina, a manager in ElZahraa organization explained that she usually organizes trips for all the workers in the organization. “We take these Syrians and Egyptians working here and their families to help them to change the mood” (personal communication, April 6, 2017). After completing my field work, I was under the impression that Syrians are strongly integrating with the Egyptian community in ElRehab city. At the same time, Syrians in ElRehab city are forming intensively connected communities that act as a support system to each other to ease their lives while they are away from their home country, Syria.

Economic engagements (as employment or entrepreneurship), housing, education and the role of the state are ways to support the accomplishment of integration. Economic engagement is a vital path for migrants and refugees’ integration in a host country. Employment constitutes perhaps the most researched area of integration (Castles et al., 2001). Employment is a factor affecting many refugees’ related issues. This includes economic independence, planning the future, interacting with other members of the host society, having an opportunity to develop

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<sup>37</sup> Aya is an Egyptian nurse. She is 29 years old. She is originally from Tanta but she came to work in ElRehab city in Cairo to gain more experience. She has been working in ElRehab medical center for one year.

additional work and language skills, reestablishing self-esteem, and encouraging independence. I was touched with Faten's explanation of the essence of her work to her. Other than the fact that it is an important source of income to the family, work makes her engage in her new life and stop thinking about her life in Syria all of the time. She explains, "When I take a day off, I am reminiscent about the past and about Syria, only work makes me feel better. It makes me feel that I contribute to something. When I remember Syria, I feel the major loss I had, I belonged to the middle class and all the basic things like an oven and a fridge and everything was available in the house; now we start from scratch and the children need many things." Moreover, a major barrier to securing employment is the problem of non-recognition of qualifications and previous work experience. Many refugees are unable to produce proof of previous qualifications and, even when they can, employers may not recognize them as proper credentials (ECRE, 1999b). Consequently, under-employment (defined as holding a job, which does not require the level of skills or qualifications possessed by the jobholder) is a common experience of refugees in the labor market (Africa Educational Trust, 1998). For example, Syrian nurses face a different type of problem in the work force in Egypt's hospitals. This is due to the major difference in the division of specializations in the medical field. Mahmoud, a Syrian nurse in ElRehab medical center illustrated this issue by explaining, "My degree is in medical sciences with specialization in anesthesia but this specialization isn't found here in Egypt. Thus, I worked as a nurse because in the Ministry of Health in Egypt, I was told that I need to go back to medical school to get a degree and that is very hard." Mahmoud added that he is thinking of opening a personal business beside his work as a nurse. He is thinking of starting a small shop that sells workers' clothes or food. He said that, "We always say that Egypt has immense potential but Egyptians are lazy and we always say that if we in Syria had what you have here in Egypt, we would have pushed the country forward. By nature, Syrians like to work and like to exert effort" (personal communication, April 12, 2017). Several Syrian participants expressed this perception during my field work. Syrians in ElRehab city are on top of the businesses and are working hard to succeed. They are not the typical refugees who are struggling to find work but surprisingly, the situation is vice versa. Unlike the situation in the medical field, Syrians are excelling in the food business and are achieving enormous success during their brief time in ElRehab city. I could not hide my astonishment when I met Mr Mohamed AlAssel, the Syrian owner of AlAssel restaurant in ElRehab city. He introduced me to the menu and the four branches that he has opened in Egypt,

aside from ElRehab branch. He has opened five branches in Egypt in less than five years, which is a remarkable success and evidence of the huge demand for his food products. Furthermore, Syrian restaurant owners and managers have agreed that they are the ones who hold the key positions in the shops. Master chefs and top management are Syrians. They employ Egyptians for work that needs minimal skills and does not have a major effect on the food itself, such as waiters, cleaners, and delivery people. AbdelRahman, the manager at Ibn ElSham restaurant confirmed this. “The master chef is Syrian because he understands exactly our cuisine and what we do. The problem with Egyptian chefs is that they always try to put their touch on the recipe, which changes it completely, and so the master chef must be Syrian. However, 90% of the stewards and the waiters are Egyptians. This is because most Syrians do not work in this field and they take higher wages than the Egyptians. Rarely do Syrians work for Egyptians because Egyptians do not pay more than LE1 100-1200 but Syrian owners pay the cleaning man around LE 2000”. He added that the reason of their success in the food business is that “Egyptians do not spend much on the ingredients (المصريين يبيخلوا على الاكل) that is why the Egyptian market needed us, owing to the fact that our products are the best. Our prices are less expensive than Egyptian products. Although I buy more expensive ingredients than Egyptians do, I sell the food for less and make more profit because I sell more” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). Mr. Hafez<sup>38</sup>, the owner of Salloura dessert shop in ElRehab city emphasizes, “Egyptian shops now started employing Syrian chefs to promote their products” (personal communication, March 29, 2017). Hassan<sup>39</sup>, an Egyptian worker at Ibn Elsham restaurant, confirmed this. He seemed an

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<sup>38</sup> Mr Hafez is the owner of Salloura dessert shop in ElRehab city. He owned the same shop with the same name in Syria. It was his family heritage. “This is the name of my family and the brand is Syrian and we have been there for 100 years”. The shop offers different types of Syrian desserts in addition to other Syrian food products such as cheese, pickles and herbs. He mentioned that he had a bigger business in Syria. He came to Egypt with his family and children in 2012. He preferred to conduct the interview in the upper level of the shop (used as storage area). The storage area was very clean and tidy. He has Egyptian and Syrian workers in the shop. He also has Sudanese workers for cleaning. When I met him, he was with an Egyptian friend, having his coffee with him. Mr Hafez is not available at the shop all the time. I had to visit the shop several times to find him. He was always around in ElRehab city visiting his friends (in other Syrian shops in the city).

<sup>39</sup> Hassan is an Egyptian young man. He works as a steward at Ibn ElSham Syrian restaurant. I met him during his break outside the shop. He was complaining about the long working hours in the restaurant. He was also complaining that he did not learn a profession from his work.

extremely laid-back worker who is waiting for the minute to finish work and relax. He feels that work is hard because he “works for more than 12 hours per day”. He added that when he compares himself to Syrian workers he finds that “Syrians always have professions and none of them work in the same job I do (cleaning the tables and the floors)”. He added that there is also non-fair treatment among Syrian and Egyptian workers in the shop;” Syrians chefs and waiters work for ten hours only but Egyptian and Sudanese stewards work for twelve hours for less salary” (personal communication, April 18, 2017). However, to my surprise, despite all these complaints, he prefers to work for Syrian owners rather than Egyptian owners because “they are better than Egyptians in the treatment”.

During fieldwork, I came across a perception in ElRehab city that Syrians demand higher salaries than Egyptians do. AbdelRahman, the manager of Ibn ElSham restaurant in ElRehab city, confirmed that he pays Syrian workers more than Egyptians because “they are more experienced in our line of business” (personal communication, March 6, 2017). AlAssel, owner of AlAssel Syrian restaurant in ElRehab city, did not hesitate to say that he also prefers to employ Syrian workers to Egyptian workers. “I have 200 Syrian workers and 150 Egyptians. Syrians are more committed because they do not have anywhere else to go. On the other hand, Egyptian workers once given a holiday, they would extend it more and more ... Can you believe that one Egyptian worker said that his mother died four times this year! I give all workers four days off per months but with the Egyptians they become eight!” AlAssel added, “the starting salary of a Syrian chef in his restaurant is LE 7000 while the starting salary of the Egyptian chef is LE 3000 because he gets experienced Syrian chefs.” However, he mentioned that he has an Egyptian chef whose salary increased from LE 3000 to LE 6000 in one year because he learnt the Syrian recipes fast and became an expert. He emphasized “the payment is based on the experience” (personal communication, April 10, 2017). In my interview with Hatem<sup>40</sup>, the Egyptian worker in AlAssel restaurant, he said that he used to work for ElHaty Egyptian restaurant but he left because he is not learning much. He added that he knows that his salary is less than Syrian workers in the restaurant but he knows that if he “learns the recipes and work

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<sup>40</sup> Hatem is an Egyptian young man working in AlAssel Syrian restaurant. He was working in ElHaty (the Egyptian restaurant that is considered to be one of the main competitors to AlAssel restaurant). He moved for a better opportunity to learn more In AlAssel restaurant and thus have an increase in his salary.

more”, he will have an increase in his salary (personal communication, April 10, 2017). Not only in the food business, but this view also exists in the medical center in ElRehab city. When I asked Dr Sarhan<sup>41</sup>, a Syrian doctor in ElRehab medical center, he explained that all doctors start with the same salary regardless of their nationality. However, “we are all competing and this is the nature in all work places. We are all trying to develop and the center managers try to give chances for everyone and they compensate according to your efforts and not according to your nationality”. Ms Amina, manager of ElZahraa organizations, employs both Syrians and Egyptians. She declares that Syrians are easier to manage because “They work well and are very punctual. Many Egyptians are good at work but the Egyptian people need someone to push them to clean better. Syrians are clean even in work as well as personally. Syrians are very clean; this is their nature and their culture” (personal communication, April 6, 2017). She explained that the organization gives equal salaries to Egyptian and Syrian workers. However, the perception that Syrians earn more may be due to the reason that some donors<sup>42</sup> specify that the funds must go to refugee workers. Consequently, in some months, Syrians or any other refugees working in the organization may have an extra donation in addition to their basic salary. Emad<sup>43</sup>, Egyptian worker in Salloura dessert shop concluded that the “salaries of the Egyptians and Syrians in ElRehab city are not fixed. It depends; sometimes Syrians take more and at other times Egyptians take more. It all depends on the production and experience” (personal communication, April 30, 2017).

Syrian refugees’ experience in the food business in ElRehab city in Egypt is different from what refugees experience in other countries. This is because Syrians are at top of the

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<sup>41</sup> Dr Sarhan is a Syrian doctor working in ElRehab medical center. He studied in Syria and earned his PHD from Germany. He is not married and he is living with his brother and his family in ElRehab city. His brother is also a doctor in ElRehab medical center. He has been living in Egypt for 4 years. He worked for 6 months in Heliopolis area but he moved to ElRehab city with his brother and his family in the last 3 years. He moved to ElRehab city as it is a quitter area. He spends most of his time at work. He spends his leisure time in ElRehab city as well where he goes to smoke Shisha with his friends in ElRehab cafes.

<sup>42</sup> One of ElZahraa organization’s activities is collecting donations and distributing them among needy families in Egypt.

<sup>43</sup> Emad is an Egyptian salesperson in Salloura, the Syrian dessert shop. He has 12 years of experience as a salesperson in different dessert shops in Egypt. He worked for both Egyptian and Syrian dessert shops. He has working in the Salloura shop for the past two years.

business, taking the lead in offering better quality food when compared to competitors. They are managing the restaurants and food outlets in ElRehab city in Egypt. To my surprise, this situation was not worrying the Egyptian food providers in ElRehab city. When I met Kamal<sup>44</sup>, the manager of ElHaty restaurant in ElRehab city, he showed indifference regarding the competition with Syrians offering the same type of food. He explained that Syrians offer a new variety of food. “I have been the manager of ElHaty restaurant for 12 years now in ElRehab city. Their effect on the business is minimal. ElRehab is a big market and if the Syrians did not come, some other Egyptians would come and open a business. They add to the competition in the market and this is in favor of the client; especially that their prices are lower than ours are. I did not change in my recipes or prices as the market needs this difference in food offerings” (personal communication, April 6, 2017). Hamdy, the manager of Grand Supermarket in ElRehab city agreed with Kamal that Syrians do offer new products in the market. He added they are talented in displaying the products in a clean and attractive way (personal communication, April 6, 2017). The same applies to Syrian restaurants’ owners who confirmed that they have not changed anything in their recipes to be different than the food offerings in ElRehab city. Egyptian and Syrian business owners in ElRehab have cooperative relationships. AsAseel, owner of AlAssel restaurants in ElRehab city: “I cooperate with El-Dahan (one of the Egyptian main competitors to AlAssel restaurants) and when we opened the shop, he helped us a lot and showed us from where to buy equipment. There is no difference between Egypt and Syria; I feel that I am in my country” (personal communication, April 10, 2017). Mr. Hafez, the owner of Salloura dessert shop in ElRehab city also gratefully explained that his Egyptian neighbors helped him more in opening his new shop than the Syrian ones. To conclude, Syrians’ and Egyptians’ integration in the food business in ElRehab city is mainly complementary, not competitive. In Syrians’ food outlets, Syrians are the ones handling the professional part of the job while Egyptians are working there but some of them are not learning the formula of success (which is mainly the recipes). On the other hand, most of the Syrian workers are not working for Egyptian business owners; they only work for Syrian owners.

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<sup>44</sup> Kamal is an Egyptian man. He has been working in ElHaty restaurant in ElRehab city for 12 years. He is now the manager of ElHaty Branch in ElRehab city. ElHaty offers Egyptian food. It has been famous in Egypt for a long time. This includes grilled meat and chicken, side dishes, and appetizers. Fig(14) shows ElHaty restaurant menus.

Syrians are exceling in the food business in ElRehab city but the situation is not the same in some other businesses. I have noticed that there are many Syrians working for hair dressers and beauty salons in ElRehab city. When I talked with Maged<sup>45</sup>, the Egyptian owner of La Coquette beauty salon and hairdresser in ElRehab city, he said that he employs some Syrians in his shop. He added that “they are not as professional as Egyptians in this field and thus they earn less salary” (personal communication, April 1, 2017). On the other hand, he said that he employs Syrians as they are good looking and they treat the clients in a very decent way, a trait that is essential in dealing with women in a beauty salon. Hussein<sup>46</sup>, the Egyptian owner of Caramel Beauty Salon in ElRehab city agreed with Maged’s opinion. He also explained that Syrians who work in this business are too specialized; each one excels in only one process such as skin hair removal or nail spa. Hussein believes that this is the reason that they do not own beauty salons and prefer to work for Egyptians. He also added that they are excelling in skin and nail care more than the hair care. This is also an obstacle for them to opening their private business where most of the women visit the hairdresser for hair care (brushing, dying, and styling) in addition to the other services provided (personal communication, April 1, 2017). Nada<sup>47</sup>, a Syrian hairdresser, said that she believes that Syrians do not open their own hairdresser shops in ElRehab city because this kind of project needs capital. The cost includes rentals, equipment, furniture, and skin and hair care materials. She also added that most of the Syrian female hairdressers go to their clients at home by appointment<sup>48</sup>. This formula has minimal cost as there is no rent, electricity, and workers involved (personal communication, August 2, 2017).

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<sup>45</sup> Maged is an Egyptian hairdresser. He owns two shops with the same name” La Coquette”. The first one is in ElRehab mall and the second one is in New Cairo. He employs more than 30 workers in the two shops. He employs three Syrian workers.

<sup>46</sup> Hussein is an Egyptian hairdresser. He owns one shop in ElRehab market. Its name is “Caramel”. He has three other Egyptian partners. They work in the shop with 10 other workers. He employs only two Syrian workers

<sup>47</sup> Nada is a Syrian hairdresser. She owns a very small hairdresser shop in ElRehab city called “Nada”. She has only two Syrian assistants.

<sup>48</sup> Nada explains that some women in Egypt prefer to call female hairdressers who come to their homes by appointment. Those hairdressers do not work in a shop. They only work if they have an appointment. Some women believe that it is cleaner to use their home equipment. They also feel more comfortable doing hair removal at home.

Besides economic engagement, the effect that housing has on refugees' overall physical and emotional well-being, as well as on their ability to feel at home, is well established (Glover et al., 2001). As mentioned earlier, Syrians living in ElRehab city choose to live in apartments that are close to each other in a secure location. Adnan, the Syrian worker at the dessert shop, mentioned that he is living in a house with his wife that he has rented in New Cairo area beside ElRehab city where he works. He chose New Cairo because it is less expensive than ElRehab city. He cheerfully explained that every night he and his wife spend their spare time with their Egyptian neighbors; "we alternate; we invite them one night in our apartment and then they invite us the other night to theirs.... They are our family in Egypt" (personal communication, March 29, 2017). He also mentioned that living around people he is comfortable with makes him feel secure to leave his wife all day alone in the house without being worried about her. As mentioned earlier, ElRehab city became a place where many Syrian families live together in a closely connected neighborhood. I met with various brokers in ElRehab city in order to better understand the dynamics of housing in the city. As explained by Mr. Medhat<sup>49</sup>, sales manager in AlBeit brokers office in ElRehab city, "The influx of many Syrians at the same time increased the overall real estate prices in ElRehab city. However, this affected rental prices more than the sales prices of houses" (personal communication, March 29, 2017). He added that ElRehab is a convenient place for Syrians to live and work in at the same time as they can walk from home to work and vice versa with no need for a car. Mr. Ahmed (senior broker in ElRehab real estate broker office in ElRehab Mall 2) confirmed that the influx of Syrians led to the increase in rental prices in ElRehab city more than sales prices due to the same reasons. According to him, once Syrians are settled in their work, they start buying houses in ElRehab city as well. He added that he noticed that once Syrians buy houses, they spend a lot of money on the decor, which gives the impression that they are planning to stay for a long time in Egypt. He also confirmed that Syrians and Egyptian are peacefully living together in ElRehab city. He noted that at the beginning of the Syrians' influx to Egypt in 2011, he received some complaints from Egyptians who are owners of the apartments that are rented by Syrians because, "sometimes the unit is small and three to four Syrian families live together at the same time. This exhausts the flat's

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<sup>49</sup> Mr Medhat is a sales manager in AlBeit broker office in ElRehab city market. He has been working in real estate in ElRehab city for seven years.

facilities” (personal communication, March 23, 2017). However, the situation now is completely different: “Some of my clients now even ask to rent their houses to Syrians in particular; they say they are better because they pay six months in advance and they are never late in payment. Also, owners of shops in ElRehab city recently prefer to rent to Syrians because they are clean and they give a good reputation to the place.” Not only in ElRehab city, but the average sales and rental prices all over Egypt has increased in the past few years. As per the Global Property Guide (2015), “Cairo’s rental market has performed strongly, in fact rents have been rising faster than prices in most locations in the second quarter of 2015. Rentals for the apartments in New Cairo rose 8% year-on-year. Villas in New Cairo registered year-on-year rentals growth of 6%”.

A third form of integration is education. Education can be the foundation for future employment opportunities that enable refugees to become more productive and active members in the host society. Specifically, in Egypt, public schools offered for refugee children have the most significant role in supporting legal residency for them and consequently to the parents. This facilitates integration. Schools also facilitate social integration. Refugees’ children can make new friends and interact with host societies through the schools’ communities. ALAssel, owner of ALAssel restaunt in ElRehab city said that he has two children in the public schools in Egypt. He optimistically explained that schools, “makes residency easier for us and this is better. My children are always invited to their colleagues’ gatherings and we feel that we are very welcomed” (personal communication, April 10, 2017). In general, the difficulties faced by refugees in host countries’ schools are often related to language barriers or bullying. During my fieldwork, I have not encountered any problems related to Syrian children’s integration in schools. Syrians, main concern was the deteriorating quality of the public educational system in Egypt in general. Many of the participants have mentioned that their kids are registered with public Egyptian schools, but they go to Syrians’ private schools that have opened recently in Egypt to support Syrian students. Syrian business people in Egypt are the main founders of these schools. In these schools, teachers volunteer to help Syrian students to understand the Egyptian curriculum and familiarize them with the exam structure in Egypt. One of these schools is called “Civilization Builders” (بناء الحضارة). However, these schools do not give certificates. They just provide support to Syrian students living in Egypt. These private schools also offer sports and

art activities for Syrian students. This is because public schools in Egypt are lacking all these activities. Many TV programs have discussed these problems<sup>50</sup>.

Finally, although the areas of employment, housing, and education are widely acknowledged by scholars to be key aspects of integrating into a new society, the role of the state also has an important role in attaining this integration. Concepts of refugees' "inclusion and exclusion" tend to be associated with policy measures that use the metaphor of 'removing barriers' to integration. The role of the state is to remove the barriers and thus allow effective integration to take place (Hale, 2000, 276). For example, having a legal status enables refugees to feel more secure. This also helps in obtaining employment, opening private businesses, buying houses, and many other benefits. As stated by Mahmoud, the nurse at the ElRehab medical center, "I have a tourism visa that I renew every six months. But I consider myself a resident until further notice" (personal communication, April 12, 2017). The role of the country also includes creating awareness among refugees concerning their rights and duties in the country. Most of the Syrian participants are not aware of many of their rights in Egypt. For example, they are not aware of their access to the public health care services. Syrians who are aware of their legal rights have fewer difficulties in their work. AlAssel, owner of AlAssel restaurants in ElRehab city, explained to me that he has two other Syrian partners and one Egyptian partner. He clarified that the Egyptian partner knows nothing about the business. He elaborated, "although there is no rule that prohibits non-Egyptians from opening their private business in Egypt, the Egyptian partner facilitates and speeds up a lot of the legal paper work" (personal communication, April 10, 2017).

To conclude, the status of the Syrian refugees in ElRehab city is exceptional. As discussed earlier in this chapter, some scholars argue that refugees only affect host countries extensively in the long time. However, Syrians in ElRehab city have been influential after only several years after their arrivals. Concerning Egypt, according to the UNDP (2016) report, Syrian refugees have contributed in the past few years to Egypt's overall economy \$800 million. The report also mentioned that Syrian businesses are hiring Egyptians and training them. This has boosted exports as well.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf56kIj-7GM>

Further research needs to be done on the estimated economic effects of Syrians if they returned to Syria. I had this question for a long time when trying to set a date to interview Hend<sup>51</sup>, a Syrian teacher at the British Columbia International School in Sherouk city who lives in ElRehab city. She was always busy and when I finally agreed on an appointment, she apologized as she got the chance to travel to Syria. We managed to conduct the interview over the phone. I was surprised that she was traveling to Syrian for a long vacation (two months) to attend the wedding of her friend. She was excited to have the chance to visit her home country. She mentioned that she will check “the country’s situation while she is there and if the security status is better and there is an opportunity to get her job back in Syria”, she will return (personal communication, May 25, 2017).

Syrian refugees in ElRehab city are not poor refugees who would accept any low paid jobs. On the contrary, most of my participants are working in the same careers they had in Syria. Therefore, they are taking the same salaries as Egyptians. Moreover, they are sometimes taking higher salaries in businesses where they have distinct experience as in the food business. After my field work, I had the impression that Egyptians are the ones who are trying to integrate and learn from Syrians in some occupations and not vice versa. In the next chapter, I will be focusing on Syrian females’ integration in ElRehab city and their opportunities and challenges.

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<sup>51</sup> Hend is a Syrian teacher. She is 29 years old. She came to Egypt with her parents in 2011. Her father established a factory in the 10<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan area. She has her residency from her father’s business. She is living with her family in ElRefab city. They chose to live in ElRehab city as it is in an intermediate location between her father’s factory (in 10<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan) and her work (in Sherouk). In addition, it is a clean city and they have many friends living there. She used to work as a teacher in Syria. She is working now as a teacher in the British Columbia Canadian International School (BCCIS) in Sherouk city.

## Chapter Six:

### Syrian women in ElRehab city

#### Literature on women in wars

The ways, reasons and methodologies of wars worldwide has been changing over the years, however, those who are affected by wars remain mostly the same. Women are consistently victimized during times of war. In 2014, the total number of refugees in the world was estimated at 19.5 million. Women comprise almost half of all international migrants (UNHCR, 2015b). Looking only at the humanitarian factor, women are almost always considered the victims of war. The idea of the distinct roles of genders during wars has long been an issue, dating back to the time of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Machiavelli. Each of these theorists discussed the role of gender in their studies. They helped in shaping the traditional perception of men being the ones who go to war while women are the victims of war (Sylvester, 2013). This illustration of war shapes men as responsible for the violent acts of war, whereas women are the ones who either suffer at the hands of men or promote peace. This leads to considering men in the narrative of war, while the experiences of females are of a second priority and, as a result, their own individual experiences are neglected. Since women are not the ones who “do war”, their experiences are viewed as less important; consequently, “international organizations like the UN have simplified or standardized women’s and girls’ activities in war” (Sylvester, 2011, p. 5). Edwards (2010) discussed the same issue that the initial legal definition of a refugee drew a blind eye to gender and women, citing only race, religion, and country of origin as statuses that needed to be protected from discrimination. Furthermore, the original 1951 convention did not address the needs and concerns of female refugees. In general, the role of women and their effects as refugees on the host countries is less researched than the role of men or refugees.

One of wars’ consequences is the displacement of populations to new host countries. Refugee women displaced in other countries face various challenges within their new host communities and among their own families. Mertus (2000) argues that because women are framed in a subordinate role, they are easy targets for violence and abuse. This results in

delaying women from receiving access to resources that could help them overcome their circumstances. Examples of this are the case of Palestinian families trying to overcompensate for the loss of societal norms by using interpreting traditions conservatively to reduce the risk of sexual abuse; these traditions can include limiting a woman's mobility and early marriages (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009). Moreover, young, unmarried girls in a refugee family are usually the most abused among family members. Other than early marriages, when it comes to work, it is usually easier for the father to send his daughter to work rather than his wife, "As junior and female members of the household, unmarried daughters are granted the least authority and expected to demonstrate an attitude of deference and servitude" (Cairol, 1999). Sending wives to work lessens the males' authority based on being the family's economic provider and changes the power hierarchy in the family, especially if the male is not working or underpaid. This also affects the gender and age supply of workers in the new country's workplace. There are few studies concerned with the abuse of female refugees in host communities. Issues such as women's equality, women's freedom, women's rights and women's bodies and embodiment are often taboo topics in most Middle Eastern countries. But, more researches are focusing on these areas lately.

An important part of studying the Syrian refugees' lives in ElRehab city is examining women's everyday challenges. Here, I examine the struggles for livelihoods among Syrian women that came to Egypt of which marriage is one of their strategies for survival. This is in addition to the many types of harassments that all women (including refugees) face daily in their lives in Egypt.

## **Literature on inter-marriages of refugee women**

Over the past decade a growing body of literature has critically engaged and challenged dominant constructions of migrant and refugee women as victims, vulnerable and passive subjects in need of rescue (Aradau, 2008). On the other hand, other scholars as De Regt (2010) highlights the politics of desire and agency of migratory subjects in her study of tracing ways in which young Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali women negotiate, navigate and challenge domestic labor in Yemen. Likewise, there is a lot of literature discussing the fact that migratory marriages have increasingly moved beyond the stereotypical images of women (as passive subjects caught in unbearable situations) to careful analyses of women's own intervention (and agency) despite their demanding situations in host countries. In addition, Constable (2005) goes beyond narratives of men as consumers shopping for obedient wives; emphasizing the choices women make whatever constraints define their situations. She highlights the significance of women's active decision-making through the entire process of arranging for marriages. From a distinct perspective, Tsegaye (2012) defines livelihood to include income, access to labor markets and any activities that are deployed to sustain life. Hence, she argues that it is important to balance women's options. Her choices should include further strategies other than marriage (such as employment) for sustaining her life.

## **Syrian Egyptian Marriages after 2011**

Along with the opposition to President Mohamed Morsi's open-door rule in 2013, the large influx of Syrians became one of the many targets of the media at that time. Print media and popular TV talk shows highlighted the phenomenon of Syrian-Egyptian marriages, claiming that Syrian refugee women intentionally marry Egyptian men as a livelihood strategy. In Ahram online, El Gundy (2013) identified mosques, Islamic preachers and Islamic charitable organizations as the main promoters of Syrian-Egyptian marriages. He argues that this is a noble act by Egyptian men to save Syrian women's lives. He wanted to promote the idea under the umbrella of Islam. Therefore, ElGundy contacted one of the most famous Sheikh celebrities, Mohamed Massad, at Hossary Mosque in 6 of October City. Massad refuted these accusations (exploiting Syrian females) arguing that these rumors are part of a strategy to disrespect the image of Islamists in Egypt. He added that due to these rumors, he was flooded with calls from Syrians who were angry about the false image of Syrian women in Egypt. On the other hand, he

also received calls from Egyptian business owners seeking “cheap” Syrian women. Shaykh Massad argued that Egyptians do not take advantage of the situation that Syrians face in Egypt. However, it is respected if an Egyptian man can afford to marry a Syrian woman and treats her well. In his article, Gundy had interviewed Assem Al-Atassi, chair of the Arab Association of Human Rights in Syria who currently lives in Egypt. According to Al-Atassi, the 12,000 Syrian-Egyptian marriages that were reported in the media were exaggerated, and accused the media in failing to distinguish between regular, legal marriages and forced illegal marriages (ElGundy, 2013). In the end, the media’s campaign against the Hossary Mosque and others eventually forced them to distance themselves from the marriage business, placing a banner outside the mosque requesting, “Please stop asking for Syrian brides” (Youssef, 2013). A Syrian father in Egypt in an interview published by Al Monitor stated that it is the brokers that are to be held responsible for the popular image of Syrian families seeking Egyptian husbands for their daughters to secure the families’ livelihood in Egypt. He added that he used to lie to the brokers that his daughter was engaged to stop them from calling him again (“Syrian Refugees Struggle in Egypt”, 2012). Furthermore, many talk shows at that time dedicated special episodes to discuss Syrian-Egyptian marriages. AlYoum Television described the life of a Syrian mother and her two daughters in an April 25, 2013 episode. The women detached themselves from the phenomenon, acknowledging though that some women “in a certain category” that need money are responsible for creating the perception that all Syrian women are available for 500-1000 LE. In general, marriage is a sensitive topic and there should be no generalization based on a few cases.

### **Syrian-Egyptian Marriages in ElRehab City**

Almost all the female participants I met in the field denied any acknowledgement of Syrian-Egyptian marriages. Some of them thought that this might be a common act among Syrians living in 6th of October but not in ElRehab city. They said that they assume that this is because there is a bigger number of Syrians there and some of them are extremely poor but there is no confirmed information about this. Both elderly Syrian women who have young daughters or single Syrian females discussed marriage as a fate (قسمه ونصيب). They all agreed that they do not have preference for a Syrian versus an Egyptian man. They rather focus on the qualities of the man himself. They all agreed that there is not a specific advantage of marrying an Egyptian versus a

Syrian man or vice versa. Nour, an administrator in ElRehab medical center said, “Marriage is predestinated. I dream of having a family and to start it but I do not plan to marry from a certain nationality. I feel that all oriental men are the same.” They all agreed also that when a Syrian girl from their community marries an Egyptian man, it is a normal marriage like any other cross-nationality marriage. Nour also added, “most of the marriages are arranged<sup>52</sup> (صالونات) where the people recommend a future wife for a man” (personal communication, March 26, 2017). Hanaa, cook at ElZahraa organization, told me the marriage story of one of her Syrian cousins who married an Egyptian man. She explained, “My cousin married an Egyptian man. She fell in love with him and married him.” She added “For me I won’t marry an Egyptian, you know it is hard to live outside your country and that would make my stay permanent in Egypt. I wish to go back home, it is my country.” When I asked Hanaa about her wishes for her son, she said, “I don’t think about the nationality of the wife of my son, all I think of is that she would put his mind at ease (باله مرتاح)” (personal communication, April 6, 2017).

The men I met in the field had controversial views regarding Syrian-Egyptian marriages. None of my male respondents had heard of any organizations arranging such a thing as well. Most of them viewed Syrian women as obedient wives who makes their men more relaxed at home. Mahmoud, a Syrian nurse working in ElRehab medical center, “I preferred to marry a Syrian women from my country (بنت بلادي). I knew her here in Egypt and we got married last year. Syrian women are calmer and they are different from Egyptian women. Egyptian women think that they can take what they want from the man when she quarrels and is strong. Syrian woman takes what she wants in a calm way”. He added, “Egyptian men might divorce their wives to marry a Syrian woman, but never the opposite” (personal communication, April 24, 2017). On the other hand, Dr. Sarhan, Syrian doctor at ElRehab medical center explained that he preferred to marry an Egyptian woman. This is because “although they are not as submissive as Syrian women, Egyptian women are ideal for me in other ways as they are dependable and work both inside and outside the home” (personal communication, April 12, 2017). AlAssel, the owner of ALAssel restaurant agrees with Dr. Sarhan’s opinion that Egyptian women are stronger and

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<sup>52</sup> Arranged marriages (جواز صالونات) in Egypt is a process of introducing a man and a woman to each other by a third person. This is for the purpose of considering getting married. If both parties are interested, then they can get engaged. The engagement is a period where they can get to know each other. It is not a type of forced marriage as the spouses have the choice to either get married if the relationship is working or breakup.

more independent than Syrian women. He is married to a Syrian woman but he would be very delighted if his son marries an Egyptian woman because “this would enhance his ties to Egypt.” He compares his life to his Syrian friends who live in Turkey; “Egyptians and Syrians have the same culture and traditions. That is why we have ties. We can have cross marriages. This would enhance our ties. On the contrary, my Syrian friends in Turkey do not feel they have the same culture or civilization. They feel left out because they are different in Turkey. Many Syrian traders I know lost their money because of these disputes” (personal communication, April 10, 2017).

Likewise, none of the brokers I met in ElRehab city have seen any offices or organizations that arrange for Syrian-Egyptian marriages. No one has met any Egyptian clients who are renting or buying a house for his new Syrian wife. Ahmed, senior broker at Real Estate Mall, mentioned that he heard rumors about Egyptian-Syrian marriages and “that Egyptian men marry Syrian girls for 30-50 dollars, but I am not sure if this happened or not. I have not encountered this at all” (personal communication, March 23, 2017).

When I started the field work in ElRehab city, I was affected, like many other Egyptians, by the image that the media had created about Syrian women. I thought that Syrian women find marriage from Egyptian men as their only way out of their devastating situation. However, to my surprise, almost all the Syrian women I met in this fieldwork insisted that they wanted to work to support not only themselves and their families, but also to support other poor Syrian families. Nour, the administrator at ElRehab medical center, said that she spends only half of her salary on her family and her personal needs, “I spend the rest of money on lending to others” (personal communication, March 26, 2017). Most of the female participants I met have either professional jobs (as administrators, teachers, and nurses) or informal jobs (as cooks or street food vendors). Ms. Amina, a manager of ElZahraa organization tried to explain the types of jobs offered to Syrian women in Egypt. She said, “Syrian women do not work as domestic labor, like Sudanese women for example. Egyptian women tend to worry about having Syrian women working in their houses due to their beauty (especially their light-colored skin and fair hair). They prefer dark colored women because they are worried that Syrians would seduce men in the household.” She added that although she has never encountered a case of Egyptian-Syrian marriage, she believes that she agrees with Egyptians women’s worry from Syrian women because “Egyptian men are playful

(عينهم فارغة), so why wouldn't they think of taking them as second wives!" (personal communication, April 6, 2017).

After the fieldwork, I had the impression that Egyptian-Syrian intermarriage is just a stereotype. Some Syrian female participants have mentioned that they feel the admiration of Egyptian men for them. Faten, the cook at ElZahraa organization, said "Everyone keeps telling me that they want a Syrian wife. One day I was at a shop and a young boy there told me I want a wife like you... who looks like you and talks like you!" (personal communication, April 5, 2017). However, after the fieldwork I feel that Syrian women are not only beautiful, but they are also strong women. They did not fear the unknown conditions that awaited them, but wish for a stable life in new host countries.

### **Literature on Sexual Harassment**

Women face sexual harassment in many countries worldwide. The United Nations defines sexual harassment as any improper behavior by a person that is directed at, and is offensive to another individual. It includes unacceptable conduct that demeans, belittles or causes personal humiliation or embarrassment to an individual (UN STAFF, 2015). In Egypt sexual harassment against women is highly associated with public spaces such as streets, work places, and public transportation. This is the same worldwide. For example, it was reported that nine out of ten women are sexually attacked in the public transport system in Mexico City. (Graglia, 2015). Furthermore, Tabasum (2012) found that fear of sexual harassment in public spaces has the largest negative impact on women's mobility in Afghanistan. Finally, 55 percent of American women described themselves as afraid to walk alone at night in their own neighborhood (Day, 2001). These statistics illustrate the international sense of sexual harassment. On the one hand, some researchers believe that there is a strong connection between harassment and women's socio-economic class. Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more prone to sexual harassment due to their inability to negotiate spaces whereas women from higher and middle socioeconomic backgrounds can avoid undesirable spaces. Women from higher socio-economic backgrounds can afford to choose their method of transport, which creates spatial distance between themselves and perceived sexual harassers. (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). But on the other hand, other scholars as Waugh (2010)

emphasizes that sexual harassment occurs to all women regardless of their socio-economic background and that harassment is normalized within the whole society.<sup>53</sup>

### **Sexual Harassment in Egypt:**

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) reported in a study in 2012 concerning women's daily challenges in Egypt that 99.3 percent of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment, and 50 percent claimed that daily, they experienced harassment within public areas (ElDeeb, 2013). Some scholars believe that the harassment is a result of Egyptian men's 'marriage crisis' problem. The marriage crisis theory claims that issues such as lack of housing, unemployment, and the financial inability to support a family are forcing young men in Egypt to delay marriage. Those who cannot afford to go to coffee shops daily gather in the streets and take out their sexual aggression on the young women on the streets. The young men argue that this is their only opportunity to explore their sexuality in a state where they are limited from everything (Krajeski, 2011). Krajeski argues that the number of Egyptians getting married has not declined, but Egyptians are getting married later in life. This is linked to the increase of education and the rise of economic challenges in Egypt.

As stated earlier, 99.3 percent of Egyptian women experience sexual harassment at a certain point in their lifetime. It is becoming a social norm that is not punished. Structural violence by the state, at a macro-level, does not prohibit or punish such behaviors that are harmful to women but allows them to flourish. Moreover, Enloe (2013) noted that the state encourages women to be silent about their harassment experiences. She noted that this is one of the key roles that security forces play in creating a climate encouraging violence against women. She explains that a woman's respectability and power are stripped by sexual harassment and fear of sexual violence. Consequently, women are hesitant to go out in public spaces as strikes or admit that they have been harassed. For example, when women protestors joined the 2011 revolution in Egypt, the government used several humiliating techniques to stop women from protesting against the regime. Women were arrested, beaten, and sexually harassed in the streets

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<sup>53</sup> Harassment was translated during the interview as the Arabic term *taharrush*. But, women feared if they used the term *taharrush* their listener could assume *taharrush* to mean rape or physical touching, thus most of the participants used the term *verbal harassment* which translates into verbal and unwanted attention.

by Government authorities. One of the incidents of government violence in Tahrir Square was the veiled protester<sup>54</sup> who was stripped to her bra by military soldiers while being kicked in Tahrir Square (Longbottom, 2011). Another incident occurred after March 8, 2011 protest in Tahrir Square, where men and women protestors were calling for women's equality. On the following day, "military and plainclothes enforces removed camping protestors from Tahrir Square. Amnesty International reported that female protestors who were arrested were given virginity tests and threatened with charges of prostitutions." (Rizzo et al., 2012: 458). Johansson Nogués also claimed that in Egypt and Tunisia "security forces had reached for sexual violence to deter women from protesting" (2014, 400). Moreover, Egyptian laws do not support women reporting a harassment case. Unfortunately, the "state supported women's access to the public sphere to strengthen their economic and political interests. On the other hand, in response to pressures from Islamist groups to maintain neopatriarchal norms and practices, the state neglected the enforcement or expansion of laws that affected women directly. In particular, the personal-status code and laws against gender-based violence were weakly enforced because they were seen as interfering with the family and the private sphere. Such laws were controversial not only for Islamists but also for large segments of the public. Even after 2011 uprising, supporters of women's rights faced a neopatriarchal political and social environment in Egypt" (Rizzo et al., 2012: 459).

Harassment in Egypt has reached outrageous levels. Many independent organizations have created initiatives across Egypt in attempts to create awareness and stop harassment. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR)<sup>55</sup> was one of the leading organizations who studied the reasons and consequences of harassment threat in preventing women from moving freely in the streets in Egypt. ECWR was established in 1996. The initial objective of the organization was to provide legal advice for poor needy women. Then, the organization's goals extended to educate women with their social and political rights. In 2005, the ECWR started a significant project examining sexual harassment in Egypt. Many other organizations focused on this topic specifically after the Eid holiday incident in 2006, where a group of men harassed

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<sup>54</sup> See Fig (15).

<sup>55</sup> <http://ecwronline.org/>

women during the opening of a movie in a cinema in Down Town. The incident lasted for almost 5 hours where the harassers tried to rape their victims in the street. The state ignored the incident. The independent press and private TV channels were the ones who shed light on the event. At that time, The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) had a leading role in creating awareness of the event and discussing the reasons of the rise of such shameful acts in Egypt. This is through different media channels as popular TV shows and radio programs. They have also used their own website and Masrway.com website to conduct online surveys related to the topic to better understand detailed women's personal experience with harassment in Egypt. (Rizzo et al., 2012). Also, ECWR shared Bussy group's event at the American University in Cairo to discuss the details of the Eid event. Bussy ("look" in Arabic) is a theatre group that initially developed out of the American University of Cairo. Bussy performs sketches and monologues submitted anonymously from both men and women concerning gender issues in Cairo, such as the pressure to get married, gender roles, difficulties of parenthood, and sexual harassment. The idea of Bussy emerged from the need to discuss both women and men issues within Egypt that are silenced through shame (Attalah, 2010). UN Women also works with several NGOs and institutions to end violence against women. One of its programs is "Safe Cities" which aims to stop violence against women in public spaces by focusing on the policy level in order to create laws that effectively prevent and protect women. UN Women created a campaign in 2014 where every university in Egypt was asked to create a project that would assist in ending sexual harassment. Some of the projects recommended offering women self-defense courses and literacy campaigns (UN Women Staff, 2012). In addition to the mentioned organizations, Harassmap is another organization that is concerned with harassment in Egypt. This organization is working on-line. The purpose of the organization is to help women to report harassment either by SMS or online; where women anonymously report how they were harassed and where. Harassmap shows a map of Egypt with red dots (that represent the number of harassment incidents that repeatedly happen in a certain area). The map shows a clear picture of where harassment most often occurs by those who volunteer to report it. This helps the organization to research the reasons of harassment in this location. The advantage of Harassmap is that it provides women with essential tools to report their stories. Then, these stories are used to create awareness campaigns to end the blaming of women as inviting harassment on themselves

through their clothes and their conduct. Harassmap also uses the data available to demand policy changes in Egypt (Harassmap, 2014).

Despite all the efforts done by various organizations to end women's harassment, unfortunately, sexual harassment has become normalized in Egypt over the past decades. This is due to several reasons such as gender related issues, social norms, economic pressures, and abuse by security forces. I asked all my Syrian female participants whether they have been harassed in Egypt or not and they all answered the same answer "Yes.. this is the norm in Egypt" ايوه...ده (العادي في مصر).

### **Syrian Women's Harassment Experiences in Egypt:**

Like Egyptian women, all my Syrian female participants have mentioned that they were harassed in Egypt. Most of them explained that they are verbally harassed on the streets. Nour, a Syrian administrator at ElRehab medical center, explains that she gets verbally harassed daily on ElRehab's streets, "I live and work in ElRehab city and so I walk every day to and from work. It is very common to find men verbally harassing women here in Cairo and this is the thing that happens in Egypt whether the woman is Egyptian or Syrian." She added that harassment is the main factor that prevents her from looking for a better job opportunities outside ElRehab city. This is because she will have to take public transportation to commute from ElRehab to her work and vice versa, which will make her encounter worse harassments (as physical harassment). She explained, "ElRehab is good because it is a closed place. It is good that it is a compound and you find many Syrians in it. It makes you feel that you are among your family but at the same time it does not expose you to unknown people from outside" (personal communication, March 26, 2017). Faten, a cook at ElZahraa organization has a long journey from her house to her work in ElRehab as she lives in the Faisal area. Her journey to work consumes two hours daily in public buses. She feels devastated that she is verbally harassed every single day. Moreover, she explained that she has been once physically harassed on a bus, "A man started touching me... When this happened I got to my home almost breaking down ... I was afraid and didn't know what to do and what to say, I was afraid that people would blame me. When I told this story to my Egyptian friends at work, they told me that I should have beaten him with shoes and screamed. However, I was reluctant to do that as I couldn't know how would people react to that. I felt that things could get worse" (personal communication, April 5, 2017). She sadly added that this happened a lot to her.

She was also angry with how people know that she is Syrian and comment on that in the streets. Ms. Amina, manager of ElZahraa organization also noticed that Syrian female workers complain from the daily harassment they face in transportation to and from work. She added, “this is making them very upset. I believe that when they return to Syria, they will find this immoral behavior transmitted with the returning men” (personal communication, April 6, 2017). All participants mentioned that their harassment is in the streets and transportation. Some Syrian respondents have shown extreme worry for their young girls in Egyptian streets. They are trying to limit their mobility alone to avoid having their daughters facing such harassments. This is the same concern of some Syrian male respondents who are either living or working in ElRehab city. Adnan, worker at the dessert shop, explained that he is the one responsible for the safety and security of his wife. He said, “I can’t allow her to work because she might face harassment in the streets or at the work place. Therefore, I preferred her staying at home. Actually, she is working from home; she prepares pre-cooked meals that we send to some markets” (personal communication, March 29, 2017).

In conclusion, most of the Syrian women I met disagreed with the perception of Syrian women as victims “who will agree to marry at any cost.”. They are strong women who face many challenges inside and outside their homes. They want to work to support their families. This explains why there are many organizations like ElZahraa organization who now have many of their productions (such as food, covers, and carpets) labelled “made with Syrian hands”. The image of marriage in their minds is linked to love, romance, and fate rather than a way of getting money or running away from their families’ difficult conditions.

## Conclusion

The thesis helped me to shed light on the unique profile of Syrian refugees in ElRehab city. They are not the typical refugees who are always framed as poor, needy, and willing to work low paid jobs. Those who are living in the city are either families who have managed to bring their savings from Syria or young Syrians who succeeded to work and have steady income in Egypt. Those who are working in ElRehab city are either business owners or professionals who have reasonable or high paid jobs. They are economically active in ElRehab city where they live, work, open private business, hang out with friends and families, and buy or rent houses. The only vulnerable Syrian participants I encountered in ElRehab city are the poor Syrian women selling Syrian desserts in ElRehab streets. They have limited income and they live in very far places, where they commute for 2- 3 hours per day to reach ElRehab city. They all complained that they do have the UNHCR yellow card but they are not receiving their monthly subsidies. Some of them have mentioned that those who receive the subsidies are the families that reached Egypt in the very beginning of the war but UNHCR was unable to cope with the growing numbers of Syrian refugees arriving to Egypt at the same time.

Most of my participants did not register themselves with UNHCR. As per their explanation, they do not want to hold the title of a “refugee” whose image is always a needy and a poor person. However, during field work, many other reasons are also discouraging them from registering themselves. First, lately, UNHCR in Egypt is not giving monthly subsidies for Syrian refugees. This is due to the pressure resulted from the arrival of a considerable number of refugees to Egypt at the same time. Second, Syrians are having many other methods of obtaining legal residency in Egypt other than registering themselves as asylum seekers. For example, most of my participants rely on their kids’ enrollment in public schools to obtain residency in Egypt. Also, Syrian entrepreneurs obtain their residency based on their private business. Third, unlike UNHCR, having a residency based on education or private business in Egypt gives Syrians the option of going back to Syria whenever they want. In fact, all my Syrian participants mentioned that they wish to go back to Syria whenever possible to rebuild the country. Consequently, the

number of Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR does not reflect the real number of Syrians living in Egypt.

As per the literature discussed, refugees might find more opportunities in opening private businesses in host countries instead of working as employees. This is a faster way of generating income because they settle in new countries without prior work contracts. Syrians in neighboring host countries to Egypt work mainly in unskilled and low paid jobs. That makes them prone to exploitation. However, on the contrary, Syrian refugees in Egypt (specifically in ElRehab city) have succeeded in finding both job opportunities as well as chances of opening private business. Syrians feel that Egypt has a lot of resources and work opportunities and they have the motivation and skills to work hard and support themselves. Moreover, this mix of working hard and the availability of resources and opportunities is the reason of their fast success as per Syrian refugees' explanation.

The thesis explored the role of media in creating the Egyptian-Syrian marriage stereotype. Syrian women are not victims of wars only, but they are also victims of media. The thesis showed that Syrian women created families in Egypt, but not through marrying Egyptian men by portraying themselves as cheap and obedient wives. On the contrary, they are building of their own communities and networks. Many recent studies started discussing the power of refugee women as decision makers of their own lives. Constable (2003) argues that it is often assumed that women lack agency in selecting their spouses in migration marriages because they appear to not make an active choice. Moreover, McAndrew (2006) highlight the significance of women's active decision making through the entire process of migration and/ or arranging for marriages.

Finally, concerning media, widely watched talk shows and famous media celebrities have a powerful effect on shaping audience's opinion. They can focus on Syrian refugees' issues to encourage stronger ties between Egyptians and Syrian refugees in Egypt. As Egypt has historically been a host state to many refugee communities, this will be a significant role for media to play to strengthen ties between the two communities in the future to avoid any further tensions. Media need to highlight the comparative advantages that both Egyptian and Syrian communities gain from living together. ElRehab city is a notable example of the harmony that can exist between refugees and natives working and living together in one residence.

Figures:



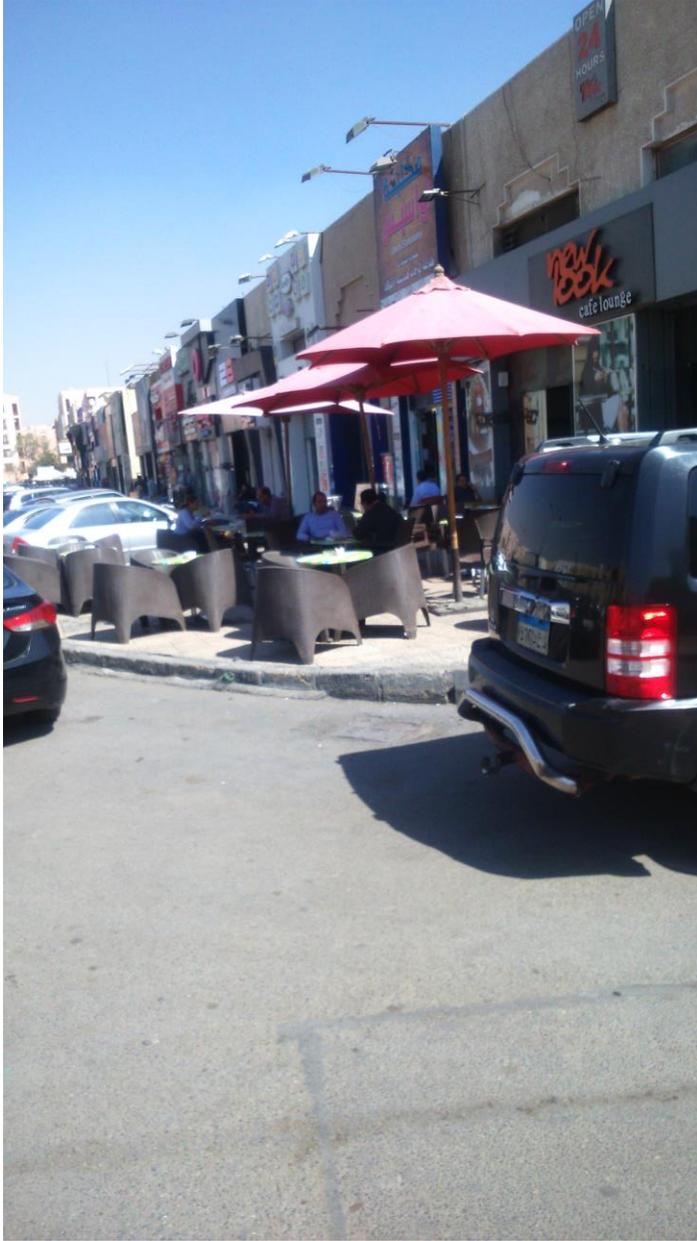
Fig (1): ElRehab ambulance service offered by ElRehab hospitals.



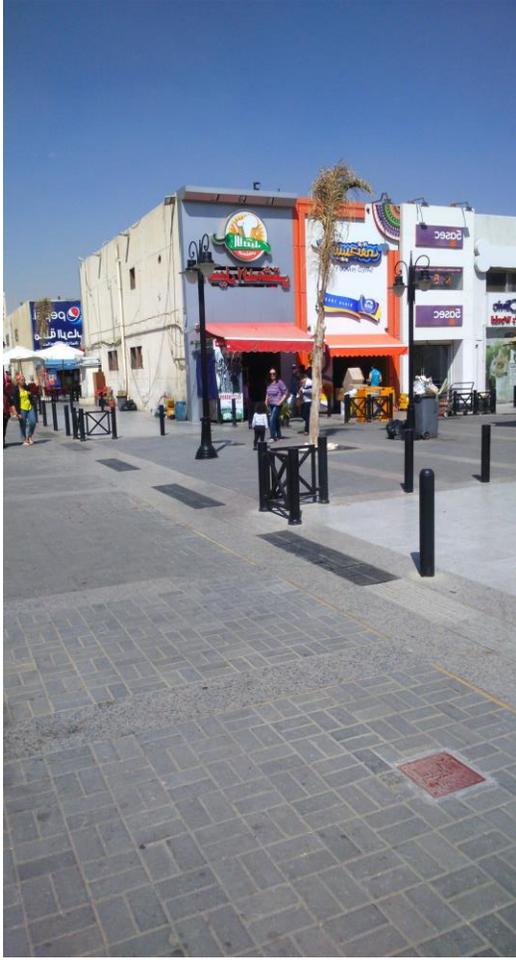
Fig (2): ElRehab Medical center 1



**Fig (3) ElRehab Medical Center (2)**



**Fig (4): New Look café ( one of the oldest cafes in ElRehab market)**



**Fig (5): Syrian restaurant “ElAssel” beside Egyptian restaurant “ Sayed Hanafi” in ElRehab market (السوق)**



**Fig (6) Ibn ElSham Syrian restaunt  
(opening just beside Egyptian  
restaurant: ElHaty in ElRehab  
market)**



**Fig (7): ElRehab food court. It includes local chains as “Café Supreme” and “Arabiata” along with international chains as” Hardees”.**



Fig (8): The Iraqi bakery: Degla Bakery (*Afran Degla*) in ElRehab market (السوق)

# NEW CAIRO MAP



**Fig(9): New Cairo Map. (July, 2017). Retrieved from:  
<http://www.alrehabcity.com/Location.aspx>**



**Fig(10): Syrian Restaurant(Abo Heider) in Heliopolis, Cairo**



**Fig(11): Syrian dessert shop (Quwaider) in Cairo**



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المشهرة برقم ١٠٠٤ حيرة



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- مخلل زيتون
- مخلل ليمون مفروم
- مخلل ليمون مفروم كبير
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- خرشوف باللحمة
- أرز بخارى (فردى / عائلى)
- نجرسكو
- لازانيا باللحمة
- مكرونه قرن

جسر السويس	مصر الجديدة	مدينة نصر
الزهراء	جانبه	حتى اهل على العفاد
10 جنيه	15 جنيه	25 جنيه
بم توصيل	بم توصيل	بم توصيل

أى توصيل الى مناطق اخرى  
يكون بالاتفاق مع المسئولة الخاصة  
الحجز مسبقا ب ٢٤ ساعة  
بإمكانكم الاستفسار عن طلب اليوم  
للاقتراح و الشكاوى : ٢١٨٧٨٥٨١

Fig(12): ElZahraa organization flyer



Fig(13) Ibn ElSham restaurant's menu.



Fig (14) ELHaty restaurants' menu.



**Fig(15): The Egyptian military police kicked a veiled women turning off her clothes.**

## Field Questions:

### General Questions:

Syrians:

Did you get a UNCHR card? Why?

How do you describe the word “ citizen”

How do you see yourself in a couple of years

In ideal world, what do Syrians should do for the best of Egypt’s sake? How should Egyptians help you to have a better life for both of you?

What is something new about Egyptians that you knew when you dealt with them ?

How do you describe yourself

Where do u live? Where do u work? Why?

Describe yourself in the eyes of Egyptians

My life would be better I Egypt if.....

What were you working in Syria?

What do you do in your leisure time?Who do you go out with?Do you talk to your neighbors?Do you have non Syrian friends in Egypt?

Egyptians:

How do you describe Syrian females?

How do you describe your relation with Syrians?

In ideal world, what do Syrians should do for the best of Egypt’s sake?

What is the difference from your point of view between Syrian and Sudanese and Iraqi refugees?

What is something new about Syrians that you knew when you dealt with them ?

Syrians entrepreneurs and workers:

- What are the new products/ dishes that you have introduced to Egypt from Syria?
- Are there any Syrian ingredients missing in the Egyptian market? How was it replaced to keep the recipe taste?
- Who do you employ in your business? What nationality do they have?
- From your point of view, what are the advantages of the Egyptian food suppliers and restaurants in Egypt? What are their disadvantages?
- Do you prefer to employ Egyptian or Syrian workers? Why?
- Do you prefer to have an Egyptian partner with you? Why?
- Do you as entrepreneur feel you are welcomed by the Egyptian community? How?
- Do you feel you are welcomed by the Egyptian community? How?
- Do you feel that you are benefiting from co-working with Egyptians? How? Please explain
- Do you benefit from the subsidized educational and health services provided by the Egyptian state? How?
- Who are working in the family members? Who are the bread winners?

- Are there any females supplying food from home? Please explain the procedures and all details
- Are you planning to continue living in Egypt? IF NO, What is your next planned destination? Why?
- What does Egypt represent to you? Would you consider going back to Syria if the war ended?
- Are there any Syrian support groups in Egypt? If yes, how do they help?

#### Egyptian entrepreneurs and workers:

- What are the new products/ dishes that you have introduced after its introduction by the Syrians in Egypt? Is it exactly the same or you have twisted it a bit?
- Who do you employ as workers in your business? Maybe in a second question? What nationality do they have? Why?
- Have the emergence of Syrian restaurants in Egypt affected your prices? Why?
- Have the emergence of Syrian restaurants in Egypt affected your service details? How?
- From your point of view, what are the advantages of the Syrian food suppliers? What are their disadvantages?
- Have you employed Syrian ones during the past few years? Why? What is your full experience with that?
- Have any of your Egyptian colleagues been replaced with a Syrian one in the last few years? Please explain what happened
- Are there any details that changed in the countries' business after the emergence of the Syrians as for example the hygiene procedures, recipes, service details...etc?
- Do you as an Egyptian citizen prefer having Syrian coworkers in your work place? Why?
- Do you feel that you are benefiting from co-working with Syrians? How? Please explain

#### Real Estate brokers:

- Has there been an increase or decrease of rental and sale prices of the apartments in Rehab in the last years? How? Maybe than as a third question: Has the influx of Syrians affected the prices.....
- Do Syrians prefer to buy or rent apartments in Rehab? Why?
- Concerning the real state pricing, does it have a difference if the rented apartment is occupied by more than one family or not?
- Do Egyptians rent/sell with higher prices when they know that the client is a Syrian migrant? Please explain
- Do Egyptians (owners of houses in rehab) prefer or dislike to sell or rent to Syrian migrants? Why?
- How do Egyptians reacting to the increase in rental and selling prices in Egypt if existed? (so you know, that there is an increase?)
- What is the difference in cliental now in EIREHAB?
- What is the social class of the people living in elrehab?
- What is the social class of the people visiting elrahb?
- Is there a difference between morning and night visitors in Elrehab?
- Is there any thefts in EIRehab? Why do people have iron gates?

#### Iraqis:

- When did you come to EIREHAB?
- What was your job in Iraqi?
- Do u know a lot of Iraqis here in EIREHAB?

- What do you think of the Syrians living in EIREHAB?  
Do you deal with them? Have their presence affected your sales?

#### Syrian Professionals:

- Do you have Egyptian colleagues?
- Do you feel you are learning from them and/or exchanging experience and information or not?
- Do you feel you are competing with the Egyptian doctors? Why?
- Do you feel that Egyptian doctors are being cooperative or not? Please explain...For example are they flexible with sharing information passing patients, flexible in working hours schedules.....etc
- Do patients prefer Egyptian or Syrian doctors? Or are they indifferent?
- Are Egyptian doctors using more updated or more classical prescriptions when compared with Syrian doctors? Please explain how the patients like or dislike this?
- What does Egypt represent to you? Would you consider going back to Syria if the war ended?
- Are you planning to continue living in Egypt? IF NO, What is your next planned destination?
- Are there any Syrian support groups in Egypt? If yes, how do they help?

#### Egyptian Professionals:

- Do you have Syrian colleagues?
- How is the exchange with the Syrian colleague?
- How is the cooperation with the Syrian colleague? Why?
- Do you feel that the Syrian doctors are occupying the Egyptian doctors' positions?
- Do you feel that Syrian doctors are being cooperative or not? Please explain...For example are they flexible with sharing information passing patients, flexible in working hours schedules.....etc
- Are Syrian doctors using more updated or more classical prescriptions when compared with Egyptian doctors? Please explain how the patients like or dislike this?
- Are the Syrian doctors using more English or Arabic medical terminologies? Please explain how the patients like or dislike this?
- Do patients prefer Egyptian or Syrian doctors? Or are they indifferent?

#### Syrian Females:

- Do you as a parent prefer to have your daughter married to an Egyptian or a Syrian man? Why?
- How can you describe your relationship with the Egyptian females in your domain (for example your neighbors, friends, colleagues...etc)? Please explain

- Are there any Syrian female support groups in Egypt? If yes, how do they help?
- Have you moved from Syria to Egypt alone or with the family? Does the family includes any males?
- Do you prefer to work from home or not? Why?
- Have you or any of the girls/ women in your family or friends got married to an Egyptian? If yes, how did they knew each other?
  - o If yes, what type of marriage was it? Official marriage or customary one? Why did you choose this type of marriage?
  - o Have any of you used a marriage office to have an arranged marriage to any of the family members? If yes, what was your experience with the office? How did the marriage work?
  - o How much was this office paid to arrange for this marriage?
  - o Is this marriage still on? What is the whole experience about it?
  - o From your point of view, do Egyptian men prefer to marry a Syrian woman as a first or a second wife? Why?
  - o Does the husband pay for any of the family members' expenses as for example housing, school, pocket money...etc.

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