# “Blessed are the Strangers”:

# Egyptian Exiles Navigating Legality and Citizenship in Istanbul

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

*MA Sociology and Social Anthropology*

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Vienna, Austria

2024

For the martyrs of our beloved spring,
for the rebellious ghosts who still try.

## Abstract

My research explores the experiences of Egyptian exiles before and after the Revolution, examining the factors that led to their politicization and subsequent migration to Turkey. I examine how global events, the Muslim Brotherhood, Mubarak's regime's oppression, and family influenced their politicization, social networks, and experiences in exile. I argue for the richness of the concept of "exile" in explaining individual and collective affects and experiences, while acknowledging the political conditions that forced their escape. Due to the absence of an "exile" legal status, I show how exiles navigate Turkey's changing legal structures influenced by the Syrian migration. The exiles found themselves legally categorized as "tourists" until confronted with expiring passports, leading them to pursue various strategies, including asylum outside Turkey and humanitarian residence. Then, I focus on "exceptional Turkish citizenship" as a preferable strategy by many exiles, contextualizing it within broader Turkish citizenship discussions, such as the marginalization of Kurds and the expansion of exceptional citizenship for Syrians. Finally, I show the embodied affects of citizenship for the exiles, elaborating on the process of acquiring citizenship. I argue that the disembeddedness from society and subjectification to humanitarian discourses immobilized their rights-claiming subjectivity turning some of the exiles into "humanitarian subjects".

## Acknowledgment

I thank the Arab Spring and its aftermath: the memories, experiences, friends, and struggles that have shaped the lives of the children, the young, and the old who then were part of this work. I am profoundly thankful to my interlocutors for trusting me and sharing their stories. To those who were curious and willing to help me understand our collective experience in exile. Those who spent time talking, texting, and sending materials, and to those who invited me for coffee during our long conversations. I am also grateful to my friends and interlocutors who connected me with others, allowing me to hear more stories. Your contributions have been invaluable.

I dedicate this thesis to the martyrs, the candles lighting our path toward a better world; to the prisoners, the exiles, and to everyone who dreams of and tries to make the world more livable and less oppressive.

The importance of the events lies in the fact that they are what gave life meaning. Cruel is learning and heartbreaking is loss. I became what I hated, a wandering nomad in an urban life I was unfamiliar with and often did not ask for or seek. I remember my father who was always my model in being political and caring for the family. I remember my family encouraging me to work hard, and in the heart is my mother, with your unlimited support, you were my first and biggest encourager. Despite the changes and fluctuations that my thoughts and personality went through, you remained the same and supported me even more if my worries grew, so the house was a place to breathe, study, research, and think. I remember my friends on the journey of the revolution and later in exile. I remember my cellmates who used to make the best places for me to study inside the prison. I am grateful for my close friends, especially Omar, Hosam, Bakry, Amasha, and Amr.

Omar, you provided invaluable assistance with your critical feedback during the writing process. Hosam and Amasha, the discussions with you consistently brought critical insights that helped develop my work.

I am thankful for the CEU experience: professors and friends who have supported me along the way. Thanks a lot Prem, not only as a great professor who taught me a lot and your supportive supervision in the writing process, but also, you were more than a professor, outside the class you were always there listening and advising, especially with what has been happening in Gaza and its impact on me. Thanks a lot Claudio, for being an older brother who pushes me to get the best out of me. Thanks Andreas, Johanna, Viola, Vlad, Klara, and Ildi for your support.

Thanks to Yoline, who made my experience in CEU loveable. Thank you for being there all the time and for your continuous support, especially during the stressful writing process. Thanks to Rita, Arianaz, Roberto, Ali, Alkim, Milan for making CEU experience bearable and fun. Thanks Kubi for your thoughtful feedback in the last moments. And thanks Elsayed for telling me about CEU and encouraging me to embark on this journey.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

"What is the difference between the people inside [prison], outside Egypt, or outside the prison [but in Egypt]? They are all the same. Maybe those outside [Egypt] are more exhausted and far from home." Those words were said by my friend inside an Egyptian prison. He managed to have a phone inside the prison, and finally, I was able to hear his voice. He drew a parallel between different kinds of structures either inside or outside prison, or even in exile. I know that they are incomparable and that he was trying to calm me down, due to the "survivor guilt" I have had since I escaped Egypt. His kind words guided me through my thesis to examine the different structures of direct political oppression, legal structures, and affectual structures.

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution gave us a lot of hopes that were later crushed by the military coup in 2013. The new military regime used extreme forms of violence killing thousands, imprisoning tens of thousands, and pushing tens of thousands to escape. I was one of the people who experienced prison and later exile in Istanbul. As a result, I was positioned in a network of the oppressed who experienced these forms of oppression directly or have dear persons who were martyred or imprisoned. In exile, I started to study social sciences, as I was preoccupied with one question: "What happened and Why?". I was 13 during the Revolution, I went to Tahrir Square with my elder brother. I participated as a member of a politicized family, but I did not understand what really happened and why later I ended up in exile when I was 19. I realized that I was not the only one who was trying to answer such a question in Istanbul. There was a growing number of people who decided to study social sciences in exile. I attended lectures, workshops, and other activities that immersed me in such social sciences students' network. People were offering ideas, reflections, and analyses that were inspiring.

I decided to study who studies social sciences, to have like a meta-analysis for my big question, "What happened and Why?". I wanted to understand the motivations, experiences, and prospects of potential knowledge producers in exile. I conducted my fieldwork accordingly. I conducted 15 interviews with social science students (mainly MA and PhD). They provided me with rich materials about my questions; however, there was something in the background that was rising up that I realized while checking back my field notes. My approach seemed to be so focused on the agents. I forgot about my friend's words. Focusing on the potential of exile blinded me from seeing the structures that limit their agencies. It was mainly legal structures that captured my attention in the interviews. Some of my interlocutors mentioned that they studied for an MA in social sciences so they could apply for a student residence permit in Turkey. The exiles' subjectivities faced new forms of legal structures in Turkey. That is why my main research question became: How do the legal structures in Turkey, in terms of migration and citizenship, influence the lives of Egyptian exiles? To answer this question, I had to see who those exiles are. How did they end up being exiles? What are the changing immigration laws and citizenship policies in Turkey through which they navigate?



**1.1. Methodology:**

Before starting to explain my methodology, I need first to talk about Istanbul as a space with its different scales, and then my positionality. Istanbul became a hub of thousands of Egyptians after the military coup. They did not move as isolated individuals, but rather with their own families,

networks, or ideological groups (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood). Other forms of relations were created or transformed in Istanbul, such as new *shilahs*. Moreover, many other Arabs (e.g., Syrians, Yemenis, and Sudanese) moved to Istanbul after the Arab Spring. This created a very diverse place full of different interactions, either among Egyptians, with Turkish people, or with other groups in Istanbul. These interactions and relations offered different opportunities, e.g., legal support and jobs, and created institutions for legal support and learning. Such institutions work as an infrastructure as they offer mediation/representation with Turkish authorities, job opportunities, and social spaces. So, such institutions work as meso-level schemas where the individual (micro-level) exiles produce and reproduce their relations. At the macro-level, there are Turkey's legal structures.

I am doing here anthropology "at home" that overcomes the insider-outsider dichotomy, as positionality is something that changes in different contexts of the fieldwork (Anderson, 2021). I will be reflecting on my interlocutors' experiences, while sometimes, I will use my own voice to reflect on some experiences that I also personally encountered. I lived in Turkey between 2017 and 2021. I was part of the exiled community; I made friends and colleagues. After moving to Hamburg in 2021 and now Vienna to pursue my master's degrees, I kept my connection with Istanbul and visited many times. I conducted in the last two years several fieldworks with Egyptians and Syrians in Istanbul for different projects, e.g., Muslim Brotherhood in exile and (de-)politicization of young Egyptians in exile. This offered me materials and insights that helped me in this research. Besides, being an exile myself allowed me to gain trust and conduct interviews with other exiles, as trust in exile is crucial (Shahidian, 2001). I only interviewed 3 of my close

friends; however, my friends and colleagues put me in touch with some people I did not know before. I appreciate my friends and all my interlocutors who trusted me and talked with me.

I conducted in April 2024 in Istanbul, 15 semi-structured interviews with life-history insights in most of them. The age of my interviewees ranged from 24 to 46. It was mainly two age groups: the younger group in their mid-20s and the older group in their late 30s and early 40s. I interviewed 5 female students out of the 15 interviews. I conducted 3 out of 15 interviews via Zoom with people who left Turkey recently either for studies or work. Additionally, I used previous fieldwork materials including interviews. All the names and places (except Istanbul) were changed to preserve my interlocutors' anonymity.

The first questions were about their memories of growing up in Egypt until they left. This life-history perspective allowed me to show how "people reshape their memories, and recycle their traditions in order to make sense of the past in the context of the present" (O'Reilly, 2012, p.156). It allowed me to understand their family background and the changing networks they are part of. Other questions were about their experiences in Istanbul starting from how they got to Istanbul, settled, studied, worked, etc. The last question was about their prospects for the future on individual and collective levels, e.g., their plans, Turkey, Egypt, etc.

The fact that the 15 interviewees are social science students enriched my research. They were not only telling me stories but they were also reflecting and analyzing their memories, experiences, and events. All of my interlocutors have a connection to the Muslim Brotherhood whether are members, ex-members, children of members, or friends with members. I would like to elaborate

that the Muslim Brotherhood acts as a social space of interaction instead of a closed ideological 'cult'. I will show the position and influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in many of my interlocutors' forms of sociality in Chapter 2.

A methodological note is needed here to not fall into methodological nationalism. My focus on the "Egyptians" and their memories and experiences can contribute to essentializing a whole group. Rather, I would follow Amelina's (2022) idea of focusing on "the transnational linkages of movers and stayers" (p.2396). Yes, Istanbul is central to my topic; however, it is a dot in a transnational movement that Egyptian exiles are experiencing. In addition, I will try to see how Egyptianness is constructed in Istanbul, how 'Egyptian' exiles perceive their identity, and their interactions and relations. Almost all of my interviewees described themselves as Egyptians and many expressed belonging feelings. However, for many, it was their friends, relatives, neighborhoods, or cities that they talked about mainly. Others couldn't identify their relationship with "Egypt" which they still feel connected to. Besides, their Egyptianness is connected to a sense of obligation and responsibility towards their friends who are facing oppression in Egypt, e.g., in prison, as Tamer said, "Why am I connected to Egypt! Because of the people in prison, so it is not good that we fled Egypt and now live our lives [normally]". This sense of responsibility with some feeling of guilt resembles "survivor guilt" tying some exiles to "Egyptianness".



### 1.2. Introducing the Chapters:

In Chapter 2, I introduce my interlocutors by following their memories in Egypt before and after the Revolution. I show how different factors such as global events, the Muslim Brotherhood,

Mubarak's regime's oppression, and family contributed to their politicization. This period fostered the formation of new forms of sociality and networks that would play an important role in leaving Egypt towards Turkey and after. Then, I create a dialogue between literature on exile and *mahjar* and *ghurba* as expressions used by some of my interlocutors. I argue for the richness of "exile" as a concept and its ability to explain individual and collective affects and experiences, while not neglecting the political conditions at home that pushed exiles to escape.

However, in Chapter 3, I show the limits of "exile" as it does not refer to a legal status, putting the exiles in continuous navigation through the legal structures in Turkey. I argue that the Syrian migration pushed Turkey to adopt changes in terms of immigration laws that exiles would utilize. I show how many exiles were "tourists" in legal terms until they faced the "expiring passports". Then, they tried to navigate different but parallel strategies: seeking asylum, renewing passports from a third country, applying for humanitarian residence, or hoping for "exceptional" permanent residence or exceptional Turkish citizenship.

Exceptional Turkish citizenship is my main topic in Chapters 4 & 5. In Chapter 4, I contextualize Turkish citizenship in general by discussing the marginalization of Kurds which shows the contestations over "Turkishness" whether it is a citizenship or ethnicity. I proceed to examine the expansion of exceptional Turkish citizenship in the case of Syrians and the questions it raised.

In Chapter 5, I provide a literature review of three threads of citizenship literature: acts of citizenship, the neoliberal transformation of citizenship, and "strategic citizenship". I show how the exiles pursue/hope for exceptional Turkish citizenship by arguing for the centrality of social

capital of the *mahjar* networks. However, acquiring citizenship fosters new anxieties and uncertainties due to the disembeddedness from society and subjectification to humanitarian discourses. In the Epilogue, I summarize my main arguments and offer insights into the study of Turkey as a transit.

## Chapter 2: Memories of Egypt and the Exodus.

> *The magic of the dream touched him once, and the beautiful memory of sin - a moment of freedom - will always haunt him.*
> - Arwa Saleh[1].

"I have a debt toward the Revolution, as it offered me consciousness". This is how Salim expressed his deep connection to the Revolution. The Revolution played a central role in many of my interlocutors' lives. "It was a street moment", Salim stresses his memories and feelings towards the Revolution. The "street moment" allowed for different forms of sociality and interactions that shaped the lives of my interlocutors in Egypt and later in exile. In this chapter, I talk about the life stories of my interlocutors before, during, and after the Revolution. Drawing from their memories, I examine their politicization and formation of networks that will play a pivotal role in their trajectories in the revolution, escaping Egypt, arriving in Istanbul, and navigating their legality in exile through the *mahjar* networks. Then, I will discuss how they talk about their experiences in Istanbul by creating a dialogue between the literature on exile and their reflections on *mahjar* and *ghurba*. I show how the concept of exile helps us understand their subjective and collective experiences without neglecting the political conditions forcing them to escape Egypt.



[1] Arwa was an Egyptian communist and feminist who belongs to another "defeated generation": the 1970s student movement generation. The quotation is from her inspirational work, "The Stillborn: Notebooks of a Woman from the Student-movement Generation in Egypt".

## 2.1. The Road Toward the "Politicized Era": Memories and Networks

The story of the young activists[2] I interviewed did not start with the 2011 Revolution or the military coup. Preceding the Revolution, events and personal experiences paved the way for their engagement with politics. One of my first interview questions was about childhood memories, growing up, and their first encounter with the public or politics. The answers varied: global events, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), the Mubarak regime oppression, or family that led to their politicization. The generation was a central factor in this case. While the older generation mentioned joining the Muslim Brotherhood or global events such as the second Intifada in 2000, the younger generation mentioned the family and the oppression as the mediators for their politicization.

Mohammed (46 years old) told me his story of joining the MB. It was not their ideology that attracted him, rather it was the MB's strong organization and its influence in society. He became an active member during his undergraduate studies. The MB's social influence was more attractive at that time. The second Intifada in Palestine motivated a global protest movement in solidarity with Palestinians. It was his first experience with large-scale protests. This political act was just the first step. Later he participated in protests against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. He became part of a politicized reformist group inside the MB through his political engagement. Onodera (2018) showed how friendship relations of Egyptian activists in the policed environment before the Revolution played a role in trust building and "everyday solidarities". Mohammed's

[2] I use activist as the person who is actively engaging in politics through different channels. Activist (*nashit*, in Arabic) was not used by my interlocutors. However, I found it a suitable word for describing their experiences in Egypt before referring to them later as exiles.

group of friends was central to his political engagement with reforming the MB, protests in Egypt, and then the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. “After the revolution, my appetite for political engagement was open”. The revolution gave him a chance to widen his political networks outside the MB.

The story of Hamza (25 years old) goes in parallel with Mohammed’s. Hamza told me that his parents were members of the MB and “the MB by nature is politicized”. He added that his first political memory was when he was 8 when the police came to arrest his father. His father managed to escape, then the police raided the house. Other younger interlocutors mentioned that police oppression and police raids were among their first political memories. Hamza emphasized the centrality of Palestine to his political socialization. He followed the news of the 2008 Israeli aggression on Gaza on a daily basis. Other younger interlocutors mentioned that the 2008 protests in solidarity with Palestine were their first protest participation with their families. Hamza continued by telling me how his father was discussing politics with him. There was an online petition by the opposition asking for political reforms in Egypt. Telling me with a smile that he filled the form with his father and that his father let him click ‘submission’. Hamza’s political engagement was “crystalized by the revolution in which I participated for 11 days”. Hamza was 11 at that time, and he was going to the Tahrir sit-in with his father. “Freedom resort” was the name they gave to the tent they were spending their time in the Tahrir Square.

Matthies-Boon (2017) argues that oppression in Egypt led to the depoliticization of many activists; however, it was not the case with my interlocutors. Hooks (1997) argues that experiences of oppression do not necessarily lead to politicization, they should be combined with a “critical understanding” of the material reality. Also, family plays a central role in the political socialization

of their children as discussed by many scholars (see Davies, 1965; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977 & Kurtz, 1989). In the case of my younger interlocutors, oppression was mediated through their "politicized families" (Onodera, 2015) positioning them as the oppressed who should criticize the political oppressive system. As a result of oppression and politicized families, the younger interlocutors became politically active.

The Revolution against Mubarak was central to most of my interlocutors regardless of their age. They told me how the whole society was politicized at that time. Hot political discussions were part of family and friends' gatherings, in which some ended with tensions and disputes. Hamza told me how he was discussing and arguing with a lot of the kids in his village who came from pro-Mubarak families. Between 2011 and 2013, people were actively engaging in politics by participating in protests and campaigning for different elections (2 parliamentary, 2 referenda, 1 presidential). It was a "politicized era" as Hamza phrased it.

This politicized era allowed different forms of sociality to take place. Many of my interlocutors or their parents remained members of the MB, while one at least left the group. However, the politicized era allowed many to expand their networks beyond their traditional forms of family, neighborhood, village, the MB, etc. Many were able to form new political friendship groups. In other words, the politicized era introduced a lot of new ways of interaction which influenced many of my interlocutors' political engagement and networks. My older interlocutors mentioned how they participated in the revolution with their "political" friends who they knew before the Revolution in different political activities or through the MB. The Revolution offered an

opportunity to widen their networks, e.g., it was the first time for some members of the MB to form political friendships outside the organization.

The period of Morsi, the MB Egyptian president, showed the differences of views and disputes within the whole society, including MB households. Some supported him, while others were disappointed in him. One of my interlocutors left Egypt because of his disappointment from this period, “the game turned out to be bigger than me”. The big actors like the MB or the military made him feel that he had no role in this political transformation. This highlighted the beginning of what Haggag (2016) called “The Third Wave of Expatriation” in Egypt since the 1950s. This exodus was exacerbated by the military coup against Morsi in July 2013. Haggag found that what distinguishes this exodus from the 1950s and 1970s ones is the scale. This exodus includes people from the majority of the political affiliations (MB, Leftists, and Liberals); besides many of those who left are young or middle-aged people.

### 2.2. The Exodus: The Military Coup and Oppression:

The MB and other activist groups protested the military coup. The MB and its supporters established two sit-ins, in Rabaa and Nahda. Many of my interlocutors participated in one of those sit-ins. The new military regime practiced extreme violence against the protestors peaking with the Rabaa Massacre on August 14, 2013, where over a thousand protesters were killed in one day (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The Rabaa Massacre was a central memory for many of my interlocutors. Many of them knew people who were killed, injured, or arrested on that day. The new regime started an era of extreme violence in which people were killed in protests all over

Egypt. Besides, the new regime started to arrest a lot of protesters in the protests, and MB members and other activists from their homes. Many human rights groups and researchers estimate over 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt (Yee et al., 2022). Many of my interlocutors were part of the protest wave all over Egypt. One of them got arrested 3 times. Other interlocutors mentioned that they or their fathers escaped their houses to avoid imprisonment. The "police raid" scene became normalized among some of the younger interlocutors. The police would go search for the father[3] and ruin the house when they could not find the father. Menna told me that she was arrested to force her father to surrender himself. Although he surrendered, Menna stayed in prison for over a year.

Amid this oppressive campaign, many MBs or activists decided to "escape" the country. Escape was a form of "existential mobility" while admitting the inability to change these oppressive conditions (Elsehamy, 2020). For my older interlocutors, it was their decision to escape influenced by the fear of arrest and/or advice from their networks. The exit decision was the father's in the case of the younger interlocutors. The whole family left together, or in most cases, the father left and then the family followed. But the question was where to go!



### 2.2.1 All Roads Lead to Istanbul:

My fieldwork was in Istanbul which was one of the destinations of the Egyptian activists and their families, mostly affiliated with the MB. North America and Europe among other places were

[3] All my young interlocutors regardless their gender were referring to "their fathers" who was politically active. It may seem a bit patriarcial; however, it says more about the Egyptian politics which is not my main focus.

destinations for other Egyptian activists (Dunne & Hamzawy, 2019). Pagès-El Karoui (2015) argues that this exodus led to the "diasporization" of Egyptians and forming new community networks abroad. Before this exodus, there was mainly no Egyptian diaspora, as the Egyptian migrant communities were fragmented and low-structured.

Many of my interlocutors did not go to Istanbul directly. Rather, they or their families tried different locations in East Asia or Africa before deciding to go to Istanbul. But the question here is why Istanbul?

Turkey and Erdogan himself criticized the military coup against Morsi. Then, Egypt expelled the Turkish ambassador later in 2013 (BBC, 2013). Nevertheless, there was no official Turkish discourse about welcoming Egyptians who fled the military coup. Turkey, specifically Istanbul, became a destination through transnational networks (see Caglar, 2022). These networks were mainly interpersonal and informal. I would not argue it is “migration networks” that initiated the migration wave to Turkey, because “migration networks” sustain the migration flow but do not explain the first arriver (Massey et al., 1993).

The first arrivers can be explained through the transnational Islamist networks. "Historical contact between the Egyptian Brothers and Turkish Islamic figures created an ideologically welcoming environment for the expatriates in Turkey." (Magued, 2017, p.487). Magued argues that these interpersonal and ideological relations go back to the 1950s when both sides maintained the relations through organized camps and leaders’ visits. Some of the Turkish figures are state or ruling party officials or at least have connections with officials. These interpersonal relations

would later play an important role in the Egyptian exiles' attempts to settle and legalize their own situations.

Other Egyptian activists started to hear about Turkey from the first arrivers. Hence, "migration networks" consisted of relatives, friends, and MB networks contributed to Istanbul as a destination. I mentioned the MB networks instead of the organization itself because it was mainly the interpersonal relations of my interlocutors with their friends from the MB instead of the organization leadership that offered the information and facilitated the travel to Istanbul[4].

Besides, Turkey offers electronic visas for Egyptians below 20 and above 45 years old (Turkish Embassy in Cairo, 2016). This was an opportunity for many families who meet the age requirements (above for the parents, and below for the children). Egyptians, between 20 and 45, tried to apply for it from Egypt. After the fleeing of many activists to Turkey, Egypt imposed a "security approval" requirement for those who wanted to apply for a Turkish visa (Ahram Online, 2014). Hence, some of my interlocutors could not go directly to Turkey, rather they went to "transit" countries where they issued a permit that would allow them to apply for the Turkish visa. Besides, Turkey represented the space of political engagement with Egypt for at least 3 of my interlocutors, due to its geographical proximity. Besides, the growing number of activists in Istanbul made it a space for networking and political mobilization.

Egypt still occupies a central part of my interlocutors' lives. They follow the news, they engage in social media, networking, and protesting, and many hope to go back soon if the political conditions

[4] Many of my interlocutors are ex-members of the MB; however, they maintain social and informal relations with other current or ex- members (see Hisam & Hakki, 2023).

change. I believe that the political factor in my interlocutors' migration and the centrality of home and memories qualify them to be "exiles".

### 2.3. *Mahjar* and *Ghurba*: Collective and Individual Exile

> *So, carry your country wherever you go.*
> *And be narcissistic if necessary.*
> *Exile is the outside world,*
> *Exile is the inner world.*
> *Who are you between them?*
> *I don't define myself lest I lose it.*
> - Mahmoud Darwish[5].

It was clear to me that the most suitable concept to describe Egyptian experiences in Istanbul is "exile". I started to read literature on exile, specifically Edward Said and other scholars. However, I went to the field and started talking with my interlocutors, I questioned the concept of exile. Exile is translated into "*Manfa*" for the space and "*manfi*" for the person. Only one out of 14 interviews used this term. Later, he mentioned that he was reading recently Edward Said's memoir "Out of Place" which made sense for him to describe his own experience. It is important to mention that many of my interlocutors have been studying social sciences, which influences their terminology. Besides, their studies influence how they make sense of their everyday life. One of my interlocutors mentioned that social sciences gave her the concepts, terminologies, and tools to help her understand the experiences of home and belonging. She told me quite confidently that "I am a *Muhajir*" which literally means a migrant. She expressed that she is able to connect with other *Muhajirs*. She feels something in common with those who experienced the liminality of being migrants more than Egyptians or Turks as national categories. Still, *Muhajir* or *Manfi* was

[5] Darwish wrote this poem as an eulogy for Edward Said.

mentioned by one person for each. It was a quite conscious and intellectual choice for both of them with a clear justification. However, the two most common words were *ghurba (literally estrangement)* and then *mahjar* (literally the place or the community of migration). Although their literal translation is quite far from exile, I believe that *mahjar* refers to the collective experience of exile while *ghurba* refers to the individual experience.

### 2.3.1 Exile is the Outside World: Political Conditions and Formation of *Mahjar*

Here, I will start with a literature review of what exile is and then show how such literature helps in making sense of the experiences of my interlocutors. Exile traditionally means being expelled from the country for political and punitive reasons. The punishment that existed in the Middle Ages and early modern state. Then, it gradually started to vanish as a legal category. It became even prohibited under Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.". The legal terminological limbo of exile makes it harder to be defined or attached to the state's specific actions compared to other terms such as refugee or asylum seeker which bear clear legal connotations (Meerzon, 2017). However, the word "exile" continued to be used to describe people who fled their countries for political reasons and cannot go back. Sznajder and Roniger (2009) define exile as "the result of political settings prone to exclude a myriad of actors, whose political voice the power-holders cannot digest and contain within the polity" (p.11). So, exile is a form of "institutional exclusion" to ban political dissidents. The exile is about the inability to return until the political circumstances change. Exiles can be those who were forced to leave their homes, those who chose to leave out of a sense of existential threat, or those who are already abroad but cannot go back due to new political conditions.

All my interlocutors left Egypt for political reasons out of fear of being persecuted by the military regime after July 2013. The younger interlocutors mainly left Egypt when they were teens (except one after her BA) with their families who were politically persecuted. All of them do not go back although some can, but either they do not feel safe to go back under the current political circumstances or they have no one there in Egypt. So, exile can be transmitted intergenerationally. In this case, the political circumstances act like an objective condition leading to exile which my interlocutors experience. Nevertheless, their perception is vital here, as they perceive and refer to an objective condition of political oppression back home.

If exile can be understood as a result of the political conditions that push people away, then this meaning of exile would lead to escaping the country collectively and individually. Thousands of Egyptians left their homeland towards Turkey, specifically Istanbul. This created a community of exiles in Istanbul. Abdin (2023) shows that more than 30000 Egyptian migrants in Istanbul are diverse in terms of their motivation to migrate. He identifies three main categories: exiles, workers, and students. The number of exiles cannot be identified as it is not a legal status that appears in the Turkish official statistics.

In my fieldwork, some of my interlocutors were referring to the community of exiles as *mahjar*. *Mahjar* literally means the place or the community of migration and it does not necessarily refer to exile. Walker (2015) argues that *mahjar* refers to "a separation, a relinquishment, a suggestion of a lack of choice; but, crucially, it also refers... to the diaspora as emplaced." (p.46). Some of my interlocutors were using the word to refer to the emplaced Egyptian community of exiles in Istanbul or elsewhere. Thus, it can mean diaspora as well with a clear connection to the political

motivation of this kind of diaspora. The sense of community and collectivity is clear among many of my interlocutors, and *mahjar* reflects such a sense. *Mahjar* has a specific relationship with Istanbul. For instance, one of my interlocutors expressed his willingness to stay in Istanbul or he would travel and then end up in Istanbul because of the Egyptian community it has. On the contrary, another interlocutor hates Istanbul as it is too loud and crowded; besides it represents the community, including the family, with their familiarity but also the constraining rules. Outside Istanbul is the real estrangement, “it is absolute freedom… I decide everything on my own.”. So, *mahjar* refers to a sense of community and familiarity, but also constraints.

### 2.3.2 Exile is the Inner World: Ghurba in Dialogue with Exile

Other scholars dealt with exile in a wider metaphorical meaning. The absence of legal clarity leaves exile with more emotional and psychological connotations (Meerzon, 2017) or even as a “metaphysical condition” (Brodsky, 1991). Dealing with exile as a psychological condition, the children of the political exiles can also be exiles. They have the ability to return to a homeland they do not visit, they keep a “nostalgic longing for an imagined place” and they identify as “foreign bodies” in the place they live in (Rudakoff, 2017). Many of my interlocutors left Egypt in their teens with their families. They express a feeling of nostalgia for a home they can but will not return to under the current political circumstances. They were young and not politically active back home; however, they inherited or developed the affect of being exiled.

Exiles are distinguished from migrants, refugees, and the diaspora by the constant awareness of the exiles that they are not at home, "The exile is oriented to a distant place and feels that he does

not belong where he lives." (Barbour, 2007, p.293). Edward Said expanded on the concept of exile in his “Reflections on Exile” essay and “Out of Place” memoir to include spiritual and emotional aspects. Said (2013/2000) sees ‘refugee’ as a political word that reflects innocence and requires assistance, whereas ‘exile’ entails a sense of solitude and spirituality. So, exile is not only a space but also a spiritual state “out of place” as Edward Said calls it. For Said (2000), exile is the metaphorical detachment that provides the intellectual with a critical perspective. Also, Bauman (2000) emphasizes the idea of the intellectual detachment that exile offers. He says: “Exile is to the thinker what home is to the naïve; it is in exile that the thinking person’s detachment, his habitual way of life, acquires survival value.” (p.43).

In this metaphorical meaning, a person can experience even exile at home. Hackl (2017) shows that Palestinians inside Israel can be considered exiles who “remain rooted in a proximate but lost homeland” (p.63). Through stigmatization, exclusion, and immobility for being suspicious, they experience the affect of exile. “One can be ‘out of place’ [as Said] without necessarily being far away, whereby ‘homeland’ is politically prevented and hierarchically encompassed” (p.64).

Exile is discussed as an inner, subjective, and individual experience expressed by interlocutors by using the word “*ghurba*”. *Ghurba* literally means estrangement. The word has a religious origin from a Hadith by the Prophet Mohammed: “Islam began as something strange [Ghareeb] and it will return to being strange, so blessed are the strangers [Ghuraba’a].”. The Hadith praises the liminal stage of being a stranger. Being strangers here is an inner state that people may experience when they are trying to follow the “good teachings of Islam”. Later, the word “Ghurba” became secularized and became strongly connected to the experience of estrangement and alienation

associated with migration. *Ghurba* has the same root as *ightirab*, the Arabic word for alienation (Schilke, 2020). Also, the word found its way to other Muslim-majority countries, for example, the word is also used in Iran, Turkey, Albania, etc. in relation to migration. The word is so wide that is commonly used among economic migrants. In his study of Egyptian workers in Doha, Schilke (2020) shows that *ghurba* "means the sense of being abroad in a strange place among strangers, separated from the familial connections and safety of home." (p.5). *Ghurba* is the "lack of comfort of the familiar". *Ghurba* acts in contrast with *safer* (literally travel) which stands for the voluntary and desired choice of migration. These two ambivalent words work together where people pursue *safar* while having to endure *ghurba*. Schilke elaborates that *ghurba* is temporal and not connected to a space, for instance, some Egyptians expressed to him their experience of *ghurba* even in their homeland through feeling alienated and unrecognized. Iman Mersal _an Egyptian poet_ sees that *ghurba* is broader than being away from the homeland, people may experience a "brutal *ghurba*" in their homeland (Eldridge & Iqbal, 2022).

*Ghurba* is expressed as a state of feeling of estrangement. Also, people refer to it as a place. Hence, *ghurba* should be understood within a "structure of feelings" in which the feelings are structured within the materiality of the space and the culture of the collective experience (Raymond Williams' in Highmore, 2016). *Ghurba* is the estrangement of an unfamiliar place. *Ghurba* captures the metaphorical meaning of exile. Even some scholars translated ghurba as exile, estrangement, and alienation (Eldridge & Iqbal, 2022; El Khachab, 2010). Both *ghurba* and exile express being away from home (even if you are there physically) and the continuous awareness of such a detachment. One of my interlocutors, who after living for a decade in Istanbul went to France to pursue a PhD, wrote a poem describing his conditions and used those three words: *ghurba*, exile, and homeless.

When I asked him about it, he said that in summer, when the campus is empty, he realizes how "homeless" he is. He does not have a home to visit, more precisely, he cannot go home because of the exile affect he experiences. In this sense, *ghurba* refers to Sayad's "double absence" where the migrant is absent from home physically, and increasingly distant culturally and psychologically; while remaining an outsider in his destination (Saada, 2000). It is like leaving home to nowhere.

Moreover, exile for Said (2000) or *ghurba* for Mersal (Eldridge & Iqbal, 2022) provides the intellectual/writer with critical perspective and inspiration. Both act as a liminal space away from collective and ready-made identities that constrain the intellectual. Both exile and *ghurba* have a sense of continuous mobility, sometimes even without a destination. "Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentered, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew." (Said, 2013/2000, e-version). El Khachab (2010) sees *ghurba* as a "constant nomadic movement".

Exile has a meaning of rupture. It begins with a moment of rupture (Meerzon, 2017) or expulsion (Brodsky, 1991). The rupture of a home that is no longer accessible under the current conditions. I asked three of my interlocutors about "exile", they believe that exile is such a heavy word with its clear rupture from home. Exile gives a tiny space for hope; a hope of change and a hope of going back home. This involuntary rupture makes memory and home central to the exile condition. Said (2013/2000) argues that "almost by definition exile and memory go together" (e-version), so this relationship shapes how one remembers the past and sees the future. Brodsky (1991) sees that "retrospection plays an excessive role in [the exile's] existence, overshadowing his reality and dimming the future" (p.104). This appears in my interlocutors' memories in Egypt: family, the

revolution, the military coup, and political oppression (e.g., their friends in prison). All of my interlocutors who study social sciences, except two, do research on topics related directly to "Egypt" and "Egyptians".

Nevertheless, *ghurba* does not necessarily connotate the meaning of exile's objective political conditions that force people to leave. Hackl (2017) argues that exile offers a link between the large exclusionary political forces and the displaced subjectivities. My interlocutors refer to their affects and the space outside their homeland as *ghurba*, but also they talk about the political oppression back in Egypt that prevents them from going back. Since exile offers such a link, I believe that exile would be a suitable concept to refer to my interlocutors as it expresses both the affects and the political conditions. Exile allows me to talk about the structural conditions forcing people to leave which many people expressed by phrases like "I did not choose to come here [Istanbul]", without neglecting the potential transformations and possibilities of their subjectivities.

### 2.4. Conclusion:

Before the 2011 Egyptian revolution, many Egyptian activists went through a politicization process that influenced their lives. Factors such as global events, particularly in Palestine, affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, Mubarak's regime oppression, and politicized family backgrounds contributed to this process. This era fostered new forms of sociality and networks. The revolution and aftermath marked the peak of the politicized era. However, the military coup shattered the activists' hopes by imposing extreme violence. Consequently, many activists escaped to Turkey, becoming part of Egypt's third exodus. The networks formed during this era

significantly impacted the activists' trajectories, starting from their arrival in Istanbul to their legal settling process (as detailed in Chapters 3 & 5).

Those Egyptian activists became exiles in Istanbul creating a *mahjar* community there. Exile serves as a rich concept, offering an analytical depth to my research. Exile encompasses both the individual (*ghurba*) and collective (*mahjar*) aspects of my interlocutors' experiences (see Ferreira, 2020). Besides, exile as the outside world considers the political conditions forcing people to escape which allows me to avoid limiting the concept to only its metaphorical and aestheticized meanings. Relying only on the metaphorical meaning can lead to dehistoricization and depoliticization of the concept (see Kaplan, 1987). Thus, the affects of exile (or *ghurba*) should be understood within "structures of feeling" where the individual, collective, and material elements interact simultaneously.

Although exile is a rich concept that allows us to understand the political conditions in Egypt and the subjective and collective experiences of the activists abroad, the concept does not refer to a legal status. Exile, either as the inner or outside world, does not have a clear legal definition compared to the "refugee" which connotes a bureaucratic and international humanitarian status (see, Malkki, 1995). The exile subjectivities would face new forms of legal structures in Turkey which they would navigate through. I will contextualize Turkey as a space with a history of marginalization of the Kurds among others and questions of exceptional Turkish citizenship (in Chapter 4) and the change of immigration laws following the Syrian migration (in Chapter 3). Within this space, exiles navigate their legality by becoming tourists, humanitarian or permanent residents (in Chapter 3), or citizens (in Chapter 5).

# Chapter 3: The Changing Turkish Law: Legality Chasing People

Over the last decade, the inflow of Syrian refugees and Arab exiles faced the inadequacy of the Turkish legal humanitarian framework, i.e., Turkey's reservation on the Geneva Refugee Convention to accept non-European refugees. Turkey introduced laws starting from 2013 in order to manage the new situation. However, the new laws filled some gaps within the law while creating new ones. It was mainly the Syrian migration that induced the change in the laws and policies. Hence, it provided a model and a pathway for other migrants to go through. The vagueness of the changing Turkish law created a grey area for the Egyptian exiles who navigated different but parallel strategies. I will examine the exiles' strategies in this chapter, except for exceptional Turkish citizenship (in Chapters 4 & 5).

## 3.1. Exiles can be Tourists:

There is no legal status called "exile" or political migrant. Hence, Egyptian exiles sought different paths to acquire a legal status enabling them to stay and settle in Turkey. If you are a student or have a work contract, then you can apply for a student or work permit. Mohammed who was neither a student nor working formally sought another way. He arrived in Turkey in early 2014 and applied for a "touristic visa" (a short-term residence). He said, "[it] was only for 6 months at that time, and it was more expensive". He did not know what to do as the community of exiled Egyptians in early 2014 was very small, someone told him that he was the 90$^{th}$ Egyptian to arrive in Turkey. "We knew the procedures from the other Arabs [here]". When he referred to a change or, more precisely, facilitation from the Turkish state in terms of procedure, in the same year the

Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 started to be enforced. The law included a "short-term residence" that can be issued for a maximum of two years. Most Egyptians I met refer to this residence as "touristic" as it is quite wide and easy to get it at that time if you prove that you "wish to stay for tourism purposes"[6]. I applied for the "touristic residence" when I arrived in Turkey in July 2017, and before starting my BA studies in October 2017. I got it for 2 years and for much cheaper than what Mohammed told me. I and many of my interlocutors did not read the new laws. We just knew from our Egyptian *mahjar* network or newly formed networks with other migrants that this is the procedure we should follow.

Therefore, the majority of Egyptian exiles were "tourists" in Turkey for years in legal terms. However, this changed after facing the reality of the expiring passports; besides, the Egyptian embassy was refusing to renew their passports. As a result, my interlocutors mentioned five strategies they navigated: seeking asylum in a Western country, renewing their passports outside Turkey, applying for a humanitarian residence in Turkey, or hoping for either exceptional permanent residence or exceptional Turkish citizenship (İstisnai Türk Vatandaşlık). The last three trajectories were opened as a result of the Syrian migration that pushed Turkey to change a lot of its policies and laws.

In other words, many exiles within this new legal framework sought different sorts of legal statuses to allow them to settle, work, and not be deportable. Although Egyptian migrants' numbers and rationales differed from those of Syrian communities, the ways the Turkish state reorganized its

[6] The short-term residence permit can be issued for people conducting scientific research, having business, or receiving medical care. It can be issued for a maximum of two years and then renewed.

migration policies and laws to deal with the Syrian case offered a pathway for other migrants[7], including Egyptian exiles, to follow. Bearing in mind the difference between the Egyptian and Syrian cases, my aim in the next section is to discuss the Syrian case to contextualize the space of Turkey and its laws regarding migration.

### 3.2. Gates Opened and Challenges Emerged:

In the last decade, over 3.7 million Syrians sought refuge in Turkey (Inci, 2023) compared to the Egyptian migrants, numbering around 33,000, involved a smaller scale in numbers and different rationales for migration. Egyptian migrants primarily include exiles, students, and workers (Abdin, 2023; Smith & Koçak, 2021). This scale difference offered a sense of invisibility for Egyptians in terms of official discourses and literature; besides many of them expressed it as an advantage.

Although Erdogan was vocal against the military coup in Egypt, Egyptian exiles in Istanbul were not mainly mentioned in the official media discourse. For instance, official statements mentioned only Syrians who got exceptional Turkish citizenship (see DW Turkce, 2023). Also, in the case of exceptional Turkish citizenship, all the literature I encountered discusses only Syrians. One of my interlocutors, who was applying for a research position in a migration research center in Istanbul, told me that the professor who interviewed him was shocked about the existence of an Egyptian diaspora in Turkey. This invisibility provided some of my interlocutors with a feeling of safety



[7] The region was in the middle of wider changes, e.g., the military coup in Egypt in 2013, ISIS in Iraq in 2014, uprisings in Sudan, Algeria, and Lebanon in 2019, etc. All of these changes caused different waves of migrations such as exiles and forced displacement. Turkey was a destination for many of those migrants due to geographical and ideological reasons.

with the rise of anti-migrant racism, "They [Turks] think that I am Syrian, but once they realize that I am Egyptian, they do nothing [bad to me]" as many expressed to me[8]. In order to protect their invisibility, some interlocutors were hesitant about my project in general, which may make them visible[9]. Therefore, the Syrian migration was the subject of official discourses, research, and societal discussions. The scale of the Syrian migration and its centrality in Turkish politics led to changes in immigration laws and policies. Besides, I will discuss the relationship between the Syrian migration and citizenship in the next chapter.

### 3.2.1. The New Guests: Syrians and the Limits of Law:

Syrians were not considered legally as "refugees" because of Turkey's reservation on the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention with a geographical limitation to only those coming from Europe (Inci, 2023). Syrians were portrayed as "temporary guests" until Turkey adopted a new Law No. 6458 in 2013, and by 2014, Syrians held "temporary protection" status which put Syrians in this liminal and precarious situation full of uncertainty regarding their settlement (Koser Akcapar & Simsek, 2018; Baban et al., 2016). Introducing new laws and measures to deal with migration flows is not an exception in Turkish history. Inci (2023) defines 10 movements of emigration/immigration since the establishment of the Republic until the Syrian migration in the last decade. Turkey deployed a humanitarian discourse that welcomed "temporary" Syrian

[8] Umit Ozdag, a far-right politician, mentioned in a tweet, before the last presidential elections, that other nationalities like Egyptians, Yemenis, and Afghans were granted citizenship (Link). The tweet was circulated among the Exiled Egyptians in Turkey with anxiety and fear as they thought that they were not on the radar of populist far-right politicians.

[9] One of them told me that far-right parties might use such a project, and then he added that it might also help some exiles in their asylum applications by recognizing their own hard situation. Certain "visibility" is required to develop compassion and get support. In Turkey, this visibility was mainly happening on an inter-personal level as I will discuss in the next chapter.

*muhajirin*/guests which created a hierarchy between the host and the dependent victim (Sevinin, 2022). Similar humanitarian discourse was used with Egyptian exiles not publicly or officially, but rather implicitly and interpersonally which will be examined (in Chapter 5).

Turkey introduced "temporary protection status" for Syrians while in practice, Syrians were treated as neither refugees nor guests due to the changing and sometimes unclear measures (Baban et al., 2016). Law No.6458 also established the Directorate General of Migration Management (Göç İdaresi) under the Ministry of Interior which became the authority responsible for processes related to migration (Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458, 2013). This law represented a turning point in Turkey's practices towards immigration. For example, the law listed 6 different types of residence permits such as short-term (touristic) which I discussed in the beginning. "Temporary protection status" was reserved only for Syrians. However, other new statuses such as the different types of residence permits were open for others, including Egyptians.

### 3.3. "My passport expired": The Exiles Navigating:

The expansion of the short-term residence option was a temporary solution for Egyptians. The short-term residence required a valid passport, which would be a big challenge for the exiles through the years. The Egyptian consulate in Istanbul and the embassy in Ankara refused to renew the passport and other legal documents for the Egyptians in Istanbul among other transnational repressive tools like threats of deportation or putting exiles' names on terrorist lists (Affan, 2024; González, 2023). The problem of the inability to renew passports emerged gradually, as the exiles left Egypt at different times, from late 2013 up to now. Many people were able to have a new

passport just before leaving. So, the expiry date of the exiles' passports varied a lot. In 2019 and 2020, it turned out to be a topic of discussion that many passports were getting expired.

The consulate was asking Egyptians for security permission or returning to Egypt to proceed with such documents. In this way, the consulate was able to differentiate between the exiles and the other Egyptians who had no political problems and could go back to Egypt. Through the years, Egyptian exiles started to face the expiring passport that would put them in a new challenge regarding their "(il-)legality" and mobility. Kallio et al. (2019) argue that refugees claim their own agency and "political subjectivity" in challenging the structures and discourses imposed on them. Such "political subjectivity" is not merely individuated but also intersubjectively collective. The Egyptian exiles individually and collectively claimed their own agency by "socially navigating" (Vigh, 2009) five strategies through the legal structures in Turkey and the changing environment.

The five strategies are: seeking asylum in a European country or Canada; applying for a humanitarian residence permit in Turkey; trying to renew or extend their passport from other 'friendly' countries; hoping for permanent residence "Turquoise Card" in Turkey; or hoping for exceptional Turkish citizenship.



Those strategies are not mutually exclusive, rather my interlocutors sought them all in parallel. Some people moved to countries that grant refugee status by applying for regular visas and then applying for asylum once they arrived there[10]. Through this, Turkey turned into a transit due to legality and other reasons that will be discussed in Epilogue. Refugee status offers a hope for

[10] A recent trend is that some exiles try to reach Europe illegally after they reach a stalemate regarding the other options. People utilize the "transit" nature of Turkey which is full of networks specialized in "illegal" crossing.

stability that after a couple of years, people can receive citizenship. People also tried to renew or extend their passports from other countries that have no rivalry with Egypt and then, the embassy there would not ask for security permission from Egypt. Humanitarian residence was introduced by the Law on Foreigners and International Protection No. 6458 mentioned before. Around 3,000 Egyptians out of 33,000 reside in Turkey on humanitarian visas (Smith & Koçak, 2021). The "humanitarian" option is the least favorable option as it means immobility and stuckedness in Turkey[11]. As in the story of Mahdi, who is now doing his PhD in France:

> "I used to sleep while putting my passport in my pocket after the earthquake in Istanbul in 2019. If I die it dies with me, if I survive it survives with me. Your life depends on it. I was on humanitarian residence for a while, but it meant no traveling. At that time, a colleague was encouraging me to apply for LSE [where he was working] but I had no passport. I could be there as I got accepted. I could not go, and I felt that now it was becoming serious. I wanted to apply for PhD and now I need a passport. I was able to extend[12] my passport with money not through the "normal" way in a third country. Someone was helping me. I did not know if the passport would be recognized or not [enabling me to travel]. But Alhamdulillah it worked. Yes, the passport! …. I may apply for asylum; it could be better for me in the long run. However, I don't like the victim position. I don't want to identify myself as the exile 'X'. Rather, I prefer to be called the scholar 'X'."

[11] One of my interlocutors was on a humanitarian residence for a year, later he got Turkish citizenship. The first thing he did was to apply for Schengen and travel to Berlin for one day, a place he used to hear a lot about and now he could visit.

[12] Extension is different from renewal; it is a stamp issued by the Egyptian embassy stating that the passport is valid for an extra 2 years. There was a fear of non-recognition by other authorities as the expiry date written in the passport itself would be earlier.

Mahdi's story reveals the dependency of life and prospects on legal status. It goes even beyond to an existential level preferring to not live in case of losing the passport. Mahdi was afraid to lose not only his physical mobility but also his "existential mobility" (Hage, 2005). It also shows how people navigate different strategies in parallel. He mentioned that he tried to get Turkish citizenship, but he succeeded in traveling to Europe before getting citizenship. *Mahjar* networks such as relatives, friends, other exiles, or exiled community institutions play a vital role in providing information and navigating possible choices. Then, asylum in Western countries represents a more stable option in the long run as the procedures are clearer and can be expected compared to Turkey and its vague laws. Seeking asylum is not the most preferable solution, it acts as the last option of Mahdi. However, he questions the victimhood performance imposed on asylum seekers by translating their stories of suffering into the "Eurocentric judicial language" (Khosravi, 2010; Cabot, 2019; Ioannidis et al., 2021; Rajaram, 2002). Such performativity is painful for the exiles or refugees who refuse to be reduced to their suffering (Khosravi, 2010).

Some of my interlocutors told me that they have 'exceptional' permanent residence[13]. In the law, the Turquoise Card can be given to qualified persons such as investors, academics, or artists, i.e., people who may contribute to the country and its "national interests" (Yildrim et al., 2020). So, it is quite wide and can be applied to anybody residing in Turkey. The Egyptian exiles do not get it through an individual application but rather through their community mediation with the Turkish authorities which I will talk about in Chapter 5. It is applied in the sense of 'exception' and

[13] Chronologically speaking, exceptional citizenship emerged before the permanent residence option. Permanent residence emerged in the last couple of years when the Turkish authorities were more reluctant to grant citizenship due to different reasons such as societal opposition.

'humanitarianism'. One of my interlocutors told me that permanent residence is only given to Egyptians who cannot return to Egypt for political reasons. She told me that the Turkish authorities[14] set this unwritten condition. She emphasized that it is a 'moralistic' and 'humanitarian' move from the Turkish authorities. Humanitarianism will be examined in Chapter 5 with a focus on exceptional citizenship.

### 3.4. Conclusion:

The concept of exile turned out to be helpful in understanding the subjective and collective experiences of Egyptians. However, exile does not refer to a legal status. In a world of nation-states and growing borders, Egyptian exiles had to find their own ways to navigate through Turkey's legal structures. Turkey's legal framework does not offer an opportunity for seeking asylum for non-Europeans. Even Syrians were not considered refugees but rather were granted "temporary protection status". The influx of 3.7 million Syrians pushed Turkey to change immigration laws and policies in 2014. These changes introduced pathways for Egyptian exiles to follow. The exiles utilized the expansion of touristic residences in their first years in Turkey. Nevertheless, the expiring passports posed challenges and the intransigence of the Egyptian authorities pushed them to navigate 5 parallel but different strategies: asylum outside Turkey, renewing passports from other countries, humanitarian residence, exceptional permanent residence, and exceptional Turkish citizenship.



[14] The Turkish authorities mean, most of the time, Turkish statesmen or AK party officials. Many of my interlocutors refer to the authorities by saying only the "Turks". The communication takes place officially or through interpersonal connections between the authorities and some of the exiled community's figures and representatives.

The next two chapters will address the question of citizenship. In the forthcoming chapter, I will explore discussions on Turkish nationalism and citizenship. This will include an investigation of Turkish citizenship through the lens of Kurdish marginalization. Subsequently, I will examine the expansion of exceptional Turkish citizenship to Syrians and the questions this raises. Egyptian exiles will again follow the Syrians' pathway by attempting to get exceptional citizenship (in Chapter 5).

# Chapter 4: Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Marginalization in Turkey

*When I got Turkish citizenship, a Turkish friend told me sarcastically, "You became a Turk", I answered, "No, I became Turkiyeli [Turkey-ish]". I was trying to identify myself with the country and its political citizenship. Then, he said, "Only Kurds say it in this way, everybody else says Turk".*

Getting exceptional Turkish citizenship (İstisnai Türk Vatandaşlığık) represents a hope for many Egyptian exiles in Istanbul. The "exceptional citizenship" is granted without the need to meet the usual legal requirements, a topic that will be discussed in this and the following chapters. Among the five strategies mentioned in the previous chapter, exceptional Turkish citizenship is considered to be the best option for the exiles, offering them a sense of stability and "existential mobility". However, Turkish citizenship is a very contentious topic. What do we mean by "Turkish"? Is it the citizenship or the ethnicity? Again, it was the Syrian migration that opened the doors to exceptional citizenship for other migrants. Previously, Turkish citizenship was only reserved for the people who had a connection to "Turkish descent or culture". Hence, I will begin this chapter by talking briefly about Turkish citizenship and the marginalization of the "Turkish" Kurds. Discussing the marginalization of the Kurdish minority will provide a context for the expansion of Turkish exceptional citizenship to Arabs, specifically Syrians, who were previously not considered "of Turkish origin". Following this, I will talk about the Syrians' acquisition of exceptional citizenship and the questions it raises. This chapter will lay the ground for the next chapter's discussion on Egyptian exiles' "taking citizenship".

### 4.1. Turkish Nationalism and Citizenship: A Brief History of the Marginalization of Kurds

The debate about citizenship rights in Turkey was raised far more before Syrian migration. The Kurdish question and Turkish nationalism started with the foundation of the Turkish Republic. Ziya Gokalp, one of the Republic ideologists who was influenced by Durkheim and French Republicanism, claimed that speaking Turkish and perceiving yourself as a Turk were central criteria for the Turkish national identity; despite that many scholars perceived him as a Kurd. For Gokalp, Turkishness was a potential that could be achieved by other Ottoman Muslim subjects, mainly from the Balkan, by assimilating and learning Turkish (Celarent, 2012). Kurds as a group identity were not considered in such a model, rather they were seen as potential assimilation subjects, in other words, they were prospective Turks (Yegen, 2009) or Turks-to-be (Yegen, 2011). Up to the 1990s, the Kurds were "second-tier citizens" and were referred to officially as "Mountain Turks" or "Eastern Turks" (Varol, 2018). The rise of Kurdish identity and the Kurds' demands for cultural rights, part of it was through violence, in the 1980s and 1990s put the Turkish citizenship question in the front. Some scholars called for equal constitutional citizenship beyond Turkish ethnonationalism (Içduygu et al., 1999; Keyman, 2012). Yegen (2009, 2011) argues that Turkey tried to contain the Kurdish question, but at the same time, Turkey was implementing oppressive policies and discourses portraying Kurds as "disloyal pseudo-citizens".

The AKP securitized the Kurdish question despite its liberal approach in the 2000s due to several interacting factors. The situation in Syria and the rise of various fighter groups, such as ISIS and the Kurdish Syrian YPG, in late 2014, along with the failure of the peace process between Turkey and the PKK in 2015 contributed to this shift (Savran, 2020). Additionally, the AKP lost its

parliamentary majority in mid-2015 and faced rising competition from Kurdish movement parties (Weis, 2016). The AKP then formed a coalition with the secular nationalist MHP, which incentivized the securitization of the Kurdish minority, the MHP's antagonist (Yilmaz et al., 2021).

This very brief history of Kurdish marginalization in Turkey is required to overcome fragmentations imposed by neoliberal narratives (see Rajaram, 2015b). Discussing different marginalizations shows how the bordered socio-political identities of citizens, refugees, and migrants are alike, as "Borders cross everyone, including those who never cross borders." (De Genova, 2017, p.28). The deportable racialized migrant represents an analogy to the "racially subjugated minority" where they share "excessive misery" (De Genova, 2014). Van Baar (2016) argues that securitized and racialized bordering practices can be internalized toward "ethnicized minorities". However, the Turkish case shows the opposite direction can work, e.g., racialization against minorities can be expanded toward migrants (Simsek, 2021). In that sense, I wanted to highlight the "common marginalizations" (Prem, 2015) and "precarity continuum" (Cabot, 2019) between Kurds as a racial minority and Syrian (or other) migrants where racialization and securitization could be applied to either of them or both.

Turkey is a polarized country where the AKP adopted a more welcoming policy toward Syrian refugees compared to the full-citizen Kurds whose citizenship rights have diminished (Yegen, 2022; Kasli & Yanasmayan, 2020). Also, Baban et al. (2016) show how Syrian workers replaced Kurds in the agricultural sector in some Southern Turkish provinces. While the opposition adopted a relatively more hostile position towards Arab migrants, specifically Syrian refugees, at the same time, the opposition was more open to Kurds as potential voters. This might lead to antagonism

between the two marginalized groups (see Koser Akcapar & Simsek, 2018). The contradictory interests between Kurds and Arabs (mainly Syrians) were manifested in the support of Kurdish parties to the opposition coalition and the refugees' hope for the ruling coalition to be re-elected (D'Ignoti, 2023; Hayatsever, 2023).

In the middle of a conversation with an Egyptian exiled friend last year, he told me: "I realized that all the Turkish friends I am surrounded with are Kurds.". I asked myself: What do exiles/refugees share with Kurds? Maybe the image of Turkish authorities removing Kurdish language signs from the street in Diyarbakir (Stevenson & Bayram, 2017) or Arabic language signs in Hatay (Hurriyet Daily News, 2017) both in Southeastern Turkey summarize what both share in common. Although the polarized, securitized, and neoliberal logic of Turkey aims to divide them, the Syrian (or Egyptian) migrants and the Kurds share a common marginalization. While Kurds were referred to as disloyal "pseudo-citizens", later other naturalized Arabs would be portrayed as "humanitarian citizens" by the ruling coalition (in Chapter 5) and dis-loyal underserved citizens by far-right and opposition figures.

### 4.2. Exceptional Citizenship: Can Arabs and Kurds Become Turkish?

The discussion in the previous section was about the Kurds who were already Turkish citizens. Now, I will move on to discuss naturalization, specifically exceptional Turkish citizenship. The main question here is who can become Turkish and how. What does "Turkishness" refer to, citizenship or ethnicity?

Yegen (2004) shows that there is "undecidability" regarding Turkishness whether it is a legal-political status for all citizens equally or ethnic/racial term. The first constitution in 1924 of Turkey and later the following constitutions were full of inconsistencies and vagueness in terminology regarding the state and citizens. The legal texts sometimes referred to the "Turkish" as the citizen and sometimes as the ethnicity. "[T]he assimilation of non-Turkish elements into the Turkish culture was the overall aim of the [Settlement] law" (p.57). For instance, only people with a connection to "Turkish descent or culture" were entitled by law to be "immigrants" which is different from other "foreigners" (Settlement Law No. 5543, 2006). "Those persons who recognized as [im]migrants" have the right to apply for citizenship after residing for 5 years in Turkey (Citizenship Law No. 5901, 2009; see also Kasli & Yanasmayan, 2020).

Historically speaking, the naturalization process in Turkey was given only for Ethnically Turkish people, e.g., Afghans and Bulgarians of "Turkish descent" in the 1980s and late 1980s respectively. Also, Turkey announces the ethnic origins of the naturalized citizens to tone down possible tensions in the society (Inci, 2023). Arabs, Kurds, and Roma were considered to have stronger "ethnic identities" and were prevented from migrating to Turkey under the Settlement Law "under the pretext of being 'nomadic of non-Turkish origin'" (Serdar, 2023, p.59). For example, the Kurds who fled the Saddam regime in 1991 were temporarily put into camps close to the borders and later sent back to Iraq unlike Bulgarian Turks who settled and got Turkish citizenship over time (Yegen, 2022).



However, in legal terms, there was an "exceptional citizenship" in Turkish citizenship Law in 1928, 1964, and 2009 (Inci 2023; Serdar, 2023). It was considered to be given to those who bring

industrial facilities or are "expected to provide extraordinary service in the fields of science, technology, or art" (Inci, 2023, p.356). The decision of granting exceptional citizenship was under the council of ministers but with moving to the presidential system in 2018, the authority was transferred to the president (Serdar, 2023). Also, the value of the investment (or immovable property) was specified in 2016[15] (Deniz & Çetinkaya, 2023; Serdar, 2023).

The Syrian migration posed a challenge and marked a shift in terms of granting "exceptional citizenship". Previously, it was only granted to Sunni Muslim Turks, now many Syrians and other Arab nationals have started to get it. Erdogan, the PM at that time, announced in July 2016 the possibility of Syrian "refugees" being granted citizenship[16] (Üstübici & Elçi, 2022). This represents a shift from "ethnoreligious" to "religious" and "illiberal" inclusion (Serdar, 2023). Based on this claim, some scholars argue that the reason for such a shift in "welcoming" Syrians is Turkey's neo-ottomanist foreign policy. "Welcoming" and granting citizenship to Syrians serve as a foreign policy tool to expand Turkey's influence in the Middle East (Kasli & Yanasmayan, 2020; Serdar, 2023).

Nevertheless, this shift to "religious" inclusion mentioned by many scholars is not empirically supported enough, as the people who fled to Turkey are dominantly Muslims and there is no proof provided that non-Muslims were excluded from citizenship. Besides, Syrian Kurds, who are Sunni Muslims, remain excluded and treated differently. For instance, Kurds, Sunni Muslims, who fled



[15] The amount of the immovable property was 1,000,000 USD, then 250,000 USD in 2018, and then 400,000 USD in 2022 (Serdar, 2023). Or 2,000,000 USD for capital investment or 3,000,000 USD as deposits in Turkish banks (Akcapar & Simsek, 2018).

[16] The number of naturalized Syrians is not published regularly by the authorities; the last official number was 238,055 (DW Turkce, 2023).

Kobani after ISIS faced interrogations, and some were forced to go back (Korkut, 2016). Korkut calls the Turkish policy "Selective Humanitarianism" where ethnicity, religion, and sect play a role in the selectivity. Hence, the shift from ethnoreligious to only religious inclusion is insufficient to explain the whole phenomenon. To be mentioned, the Turkish descent element is still a factor as over 20% of naturalized Syrians are Turkmens (Yegen, 2022).

Although deportation centers and campaigns have proliferated in Turkey in recent years (in Chapter 5), AKP policies have been portrayed as "welcoming" the Syrians. This perception has fueled anti-migrant sentiments among citizens who see themselves as second-class and struggling to access basic rights. The economic crisis of 2018, deteriorating economic conditions, and the rise of far-right parties have also contributed to these sentiments.

There is wide societal opposition to the Syrian presence in Turkey and the expansion of granting Turkish citizenship (Bozdağ, 2020; Şimşek, 2021; Güney, 2022; Serdar, 2023). According to the 2021 Syrians Barometer, 82% of Turkish citizens see that Syrians should be sent back to Syria definitely or to safe zones, and 67.9% of the citizens opposed granting Turkish citizenship to any Syrian (Erdogan, 2022). In her fieldwork in Bolu[17], Turkey, Güney (2022) found that the majority of Turkish citizens oppose granting Turkish citizenship to Syrians. She concluded that the othering process and the refusal of refugees' citizenship attainment are mainly based on subjective and non-measurable elements such as loyalty, ethnicity, and belonging instead of objective aspects of citizenship such as rights and duties.

[17] Güney considers that Bolu is known as a nationalist/conservative city where its mayor adopts an anti-refugee stance, hence, this makes Bolu a good choice to examine nationalism, citizenship, and the attitudes towards Syrians in Turkey.

Amid this societal refusal, the Turkish state uses a mix of a moralistic discourse of Syrian brothers who fled the war and a pragmatic discourse about the investments and qualifications of those who got citizenship to justify the expansion of citizenship (Serdar, 2023). In general, exceptional citizenship seems quite random as the Syrians are called by the authorities to be interviewed and start their citizenship process. It is not clear how this happens or on which basis. However, the literature shows that class, cultural, and social capital play a pivotal role in the attainment of exceptional citizenship (Koser Akcapar & Simsek, 2018; Simsek, 2021; Üstübici & Elçi, 2022; Serdar, 2023).

Many scholars criticize granting citizenship by asking for more transparency and mobilizing "integration discourse" (see Inci,2023; Serdar, 2023). They refer to the importance of integrating "non-Turks" before granting them citizenship. They do not question or even define the concepts of "Turkishness", "Turkification", and "integration". The scholars do not question how the same concept contains different meanings in different contexts. Their borrowing or using such concepts in line with European scholarship is problematic (see Awad, 2023). The appeal to democratic politics of citizenship may work as a veil of anti-immigration populism that aims to preserve the "national identity of the nation"[18] (De Genova, 2014). Besides, such a scholarship starts with a theoretical imagination about society as a whole with a specific identity (Schinkel, 2018). In the "integration paradigm", states (and also scholars) collectivize people into their ethnic backgrounds; nevertheless, the failure of 'integration' becomes individual responsibility, but at the same time, the blame is de-individualized and aggregated to an attributed ethnic identity (Schinkel,

[18] An example of such a discourse is: "Considering the fact that Turkish national identity has firmly been defined by Turkishness and a strong commitment to the Turkification of those included into Turkishness,100 the current inclusion of selected non-co-ethnic Syrians (Arabs) without their anticipated Turkification triggers a crisis in the Turkish national identity." (Serdar, 2023, p.66).

2018). Also, the literature is state-centered by analyzing the state and its policies and considering Turks or Syrians as one entity. So, the literature falls into methodological nationalism that naturalizes nation-states and equates society with the nation-state (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003; Caglar, 2022). There is a lack of ethnographic work that incorporates the views of Syrian refugees (or others) toward exceptional citizenship. As an exception, Akcapar & Simsek (2018) show that some Syrians seek Turkish citizenship as a way of securing their legal status and granting them equal rights with Turks.

### 4.3.Conclusion:

The exploration of Turkish citizenship and its complexities reveals the multifaceted nature of "Turkishness" within the Turkish Republic. The historical marginalization of the Kurdish minority illustrates the inherent tension between ethnicity and citizenship, allowing us to understand the recent issues faced by new migrants, especially Syrians. The Syrian migration has introduced new dynamics to the contentious discourses on Turkish citizenship. Naturalization through exceptional Turkish citizenship to include those previously considered to have no connection to "Turkish descent or culture" raised societal opposition and discourses of "integration" by some scholars. The AKP's approach to Syrian refugees, juxtaposed with its treatment of the Kurdish minority, shows the polarized and contradictory dynamics of Turkish nationalism. The AKP did not “welcome” the Syrians by granting them citizenship, rather it was a tool of differential inclusion of some while leaving the majority facing economic marginalization and deportation. Even those

who were granted citizenship were disembedded from society and subjected to discourses shaping them into “humanitarian citizens”, as I will illustrate through the Egyptian case in Chapter 5.

# Chapter 5: The Limits of Exceptional Inclusion: Citizenship, Networks, and Precarity

*Before going to bed on the night of October 6th, 2023, a friend (who already works in Germany) sent a message to a WhatsApp group of Egyptian friends from Istanbul who all are also Turkish citizens, "Does anybody have information related to the revision of Citizenship? Some people say that many of those who got the [Turkish] citizenship are being re-assessed". He sent a screenshot that shows that his file was re-assessed although he got citizenship in late 2019. Another friend said, "Unfortunately no one understands anything", and he said it is not only exceptional citizenship but also other kinds of citizenship. Then, a lot of speculations and fears were sent. Then, the next day while the group was full of news about Palestine on October 7th, the same friend sent another screenshot and said that the citizenship was back, "maybe it was an error in the system."*

*Later, during my fieldwork in April, Mohammed brought back the story of the "error in the system" and said that he did not have Turkish citizenship and he was facing more precarity regarding his legal situation; however, he added that those Egyptians with Turkish citizenship were more anxious and followed the relevant news with more panic. He told me the story of someone whose Turkish citizenship was revoked, and then he got his citizenship back; nevertheless, the circulation of the news about "getting it back" was far less compared to the revocation. He continued telling me about how the naturalized Egyptians followed the Turkish elections, Erdogan's visit to Egypt, and the rapprochement between Egypt and Turkey with more panic.*

Despite many exiles hoping for citizenship to have more stability, getting citizenship creates new forms of precarity. Exceptional citizenship procedures are unclear. Social capital and the *mahjar* networks with the Turkish authorities play a pivotal role in the process. Nevertheless, the disembeddedness from society and the unfamiliarity with its laws foster rumors and uncertainty about the potential of revocation. Additionally, the humanitarian discourse of citizenship creates a hierarchy, making exiles dependent on Turkey's benevolence and transforming some of the naturalized exiles into "humanitarian subjects" who are unable to claim their citizenship rights. The first story highlights an "error in the system" that deepens the feeling of disembeddedness and potential revocability. The second story reveals that citizenship is legally revocable and the anxiety embodied in becoming a humanitarian citizen, illustrated by Mohammed's mockery of the naturalized exiles for being more anxious than him.

What does it mean to be a citizen? I start this chapter with a literature review of three threads of citizenship literature to situate the experiences of the naturalized exiles. "Acts of citizenship" shows the contestations over citizenship beyond the binary of citizen-alien. In that sense, the disembeddedness from society and humanitarian discourses can limit the rights-claiming of the naturalized exiles. Then, I argue that the "commodification of citizenship" is insufficient to explain the whole phenomenon of the expansion of exceptional citizenship. Also, I argue that citizenship embodies affects for the exiles such as fear, providing a critique of the instrumental understanding of "strategic citizenship" literature. To illustrate this, I show the centrality of social capital within *mahjar* to understand the process of getting exceptional citizenship. Then, I examine the (dis-)embededdness of the naturalized exiles. Lastly, I argue how all these factors combined with Turkey's humanitarian discourses immobilize the rights-claiming of exiles.

### 5.1. Citizenship Literature Review: Acts, Neoliberalism, and Affective Documents:

Citizenship is not just a concept but rather an institution that denotes membership in a nation-state (Joppke, 2022). Citizenship literature is quite wide and examines, among many issues, different aspects of legality, status, claiming rights, the neoliberal transformation of citizenship, and strategies for acquiring it. For the sake of examining Turkish exceptional citizenship, I will examine three threads of the literature: acts of citizenship, commodification of citizenship, and strategic citizenship. The first one expands citizenship beyond the legal status to spaces of contestation by the different actors claiming their rights (Isin, 2008). The second examines the neoliberal turn of citizenship and how it turns out to be a commodity/privilege that can be sold or earned (Joppke, 2022; Shachar, 2021). The last shows the strategies of individuals to acquire "instrumental citizenship" that does not necessarily reflect an "attachment to the new homeland" Harpaz, & Mateos, 2019; Joppke, 2018). Acts of citizenship work like the umbrella that shows the interaction between different actors, mainly contesting the state. The neo-liberalization of citizenship is a move by the state to further inequality. Then, people may seek citizenship utilizing neo-liberalization or exceptions to secure their living conditions.

Critical citizenship studies criticized the liberal understanding of citizenship for its focus on the legal and formal status or arrangements of being a citizen of a state. Rather citizenship should be understood as the practices of becoming "claim-making subjects" (Isin, 2008; Isin & Saward, 2013). The transnational migration scholars contributed to this shift by examining the rising mobility of citizens and non-citizens carrying their webs of rights and obligations (Isin, 2008; Caglar, 2015). "Acts of citizenship" offers a lens to examine practices beyond the citizen-alien binary. For instance, EU Roma citizens are treated as aliens through discourses instead of legal

language and they claim their rights beyond their own legal status (Caglar, 2017). Hence, *acts of citizenship* transcends categories and identities such as migrants or citizens to show how citizenship is an open-ended process of contestation. According to Isin (2008), citizenship here is learned, not inherited, it is about how the individuals become political and enact themselves as citizens or strangers through solidaristic or alienating modes of being. Acts are not necessarily intentional, calculable, or even lawful. Acts of citizenship question the law and may even break it. Through such acts, new sites and scales of struggle are created and new actors are introduced (Isin, 2008; Isin & Saward, 2013; Caglar, 2015). These acts challenge the formal arrangements in traditional sites, e.g., voting, or new ones, such as protests and social media (Isin & Saward, 2013). The new actors may disrupt the normativity of citizenship by transforming themselves as right-claiming subjects through their acts. However, these acts can lead to inclusion/exclusion, tolerance/intolerance, or diversity/homogeneity as they are contentious open-ended projects with potentially positive or negative outcomes (Isin, 2008).

Isin (2017) argues that *acts of citizenship* helps us to understand citizenship as "performative" that can be traced beyond the "democratic polities" by examining the traditions of claiming rights and their transformations in post-colonial contexts. How individuals perform citizenship influences (re-)construction of "citizenship and attaching meanings to rights." (p.501). Isin (2019) shows that citizenship is usually performed in the gaps of different senses of citizenship: in theory, in practice, in law, and in acts. In other words, there is a conflict between the meanings, habits, enforcement of laws, and resistance. The actors try to utilize such tensions in their favor. For example, "Turkishness" disputes of citizenship (see Chapter 4) and the legal exception offer a space for the exiles to pursue citizenship. In such a process of claim-making, gaps and challenges are created

by the interaction of different processes and actors. For instance, the Turkish state's humanitarianism and exception offer hope for exile, but at the same time, it can lead to more structural restrictions and suppression of the exiles' agencies. Instead of performative citizenship that focuses on the individual's agency, Bloemraad (2018) argues that citizenship should be understood as "claims-making" and relational "processes of recognition within a dynamic of the structured agency." (p.20). The claims of the individuals are constrained by the legal and institutional structures and relations of power where they perform.

Situating citizenship as a "status" should not be neglected altogether. Status is still an important element that many exiles try to acquire. Citizenship regimes create "inequality" of legal status that Egyptian exiles try to overcome by pursuing citizenship to be protected from deportation (see Bloemraad, 2018; De Genova, 2014). "Taking citizenship" is part of the exiles' claims for the entitlement of certain rights. It is important to mention that "citizenship as status does not translate into *acting* like a citizen, seeking to engage with questions of moral and political directions. The status citizen can be a regulated and depoliticised entity, particularly if it has been so closely welded to the nation-state." (Rajaram, 2015a, p.29). Therefore, my focus will be on the practices of contestation around such status through claim-making that function within certain structures. For instance, Turkey's legal structures and humanitarian discourse aim to depoliticize the exiles by transforming them from right-claiming subjects into humanitarian subjects. Thus, citizenship is a fluid and open-ended project, and Turkish exceptional citizenship signifies such fluidity by filling gaps while creating others that exiles try to utilize.

Moving to the second thread of citizenship literature, due to the neoliberal transformations, Joppke (2022) argues that citizenship shifted from a liberal understanding based on rights to a neoliberal-nationalist understanding based on privilege. Citizenship becomes a "precious privilege" to be "earned" by hard work and loyalty to the state. Citizenship turns out to be a prize and the last step of integration. Neoliberal earned citizenship is more difficult to get but also easier to lose. The fluidity is an important component of the emerging neoliberal forms of citizenship. Another form of neoliberal citizenship is what some scholars call "commodified citizenship". Many countries introduced different regulations for "Golden" visas or passports, allowing people to acquire citizenship by investing some amount of money (Eroğlu Utku & Sirkeci, 2020). Such regulations offer fast tracks for the wealthy elites to bypass standard naturalization procedures. As a result, commodified citizenship amplifies stratifications and inequalities of access, both within the polity and "transnationally among different categories of would-be immigrants." (Shachar, 2021, p.544). Turkey introduced in 2016 specific values of money to be invested (e.g., real estate) that allow individuals to acquire Turkish exceptional citizenship. Some scholars argue that such a move represents "commodification", "neo-liberalization", or "selling" citizenship (Eroğlu Utku & Sirkeci; 2020; Serdar, 2023; Inci, 2023). They examine the changes in the laws and the pragmatic discourse of the government regarding the potential value that the naturalized citizens would bring to the country through their money and qualifications. However, this concept is not enough to understand Turkish exceptional citizenship in which investing money is just a sub-category of it. For example, over the last decade, 238,055 Syrians, other nationalities are not mentioned, got exceptional citizenship (DW Turkce, 2023) while 25,969 foreign investors got it by investment (Hamsici, 2023). The humanitarian logic and discourse of exceptional citizenship are also

important to understand the wider framework of the expansion of exceptional citizenship[19]. So, the scholars' claims about the commodification of citizenship are partially true; nevertheless, the claims are insufficient to explain the wider category of exceptional citizenship. Besides, such concepts are state-centric and do not examine what citizenship means for refugees and exiles, in terms of providing security and certainty in changing environments. For example, Deniz & Çetinkaya (2023) show that some Iranian and Afghan dissidents (exiles), who are afraid to go back home because of the risk of persecution, seek Turkish citizenship through investment to protect themselves from being deportable. So, why do people seek citizenship?

In Egyptian Arabic, people use *Mwatana* and *Jinsiya* as two different words for citizenship. While the former refers to the civic and political values, rights, and duties of being a citizen, the latter refers to the legal documents of citizenship such as the passport. All of my interlocutors used the word *Jinsiya*. They say, "I took the Turkish *jinsiya*". I do not want to delve into the possible semantic differences in English[20]. Taking *jinsiya* can be understood from the literature on "instrumental citizenship" (O'Brien, 2016; Joppke, 2018) or "strategic citizenship"[21] (Harpaz, & Mateos, 2019). According to this literature, acquiring citizenship is a pragmatic strategy that individuals pursue to secure their living conditions. However, the individuals tend to be "less emotionally and politically attached to their new homelands" (Harpaz & Mateos, 2019, p.848)

[19] The scholars discussed commodification in its economic terms which are partially true. However, if we expand commodification to different forms of capital, then exceptional citizenship can be understood also as cultural commodification. The neo-ottomanist vision of the AKP utilizes the cultural capital embedded in its Islamic humanitarian discourse of helping their Muslim brothers. In that sense, the Syrian or Egyptian brothers are culturally commodified within a wider vision of the ruling party in Turkey. (Thanks to my supervisor Prem for offering me this insight).

[20] Some scholars show such a difference in other contexts between "nationality" as the legal aspect and "citizenship" as the condition of having rights (see Pedroza & Palop-García, 2017). While other scholars explore the cultural meanings embedded in nationality.

[21] This literature intersects with the commodification of citizenship, discussed before, as one of the strategies.

leading to what Joppke (2010) called "lightening citizenship" and a "dissociation between citizenship and nationhood" (p.19). Borisova (2020) argues that this literature can contribute to anti-migrant discourses by distinguishing between legitimate (with emotional attachment) and illegitimate (with instrumental/strategic attachment) citizens. By examining Tajiks acquiring Russian citizenship, which is non-Western and non-elitist context, the author argues that acts of "taking citizenship" should be understood as a "social navigation" in "constantly shifting environments" rather than rational "strategizing". Besides, strategic citizenship literature excludes the affects involved in the process of "taking citizenship" which is connected to "ideas about opportunities for meaningful life and future imaginaries" (p.3).

Egyptian exiles seek citizenship to secure their precarious lives. The "affective documents" (Navaro-Yashin, 2007) like a passport contain a lot of affects in the process of acquiring them and after. The indeterminacies of legal documents can be used as a governance technique by creating uncertainty, anxiety, and fear (Kelly, 2006). Citizenship gives the exiles a sense of "existential mobility" while having no papers would mean "stuckedness" and "entrapment" (Borisova, 2020). Another element specific to exiles is deportability (De Genova, 2002) and the fear of being deported back to Egypt where they would face forced disappearance and imprisonment[22]. Basok et al. (2013) show that deportability applies not only to undocumented migrants but also to documented migrants. Deportability is not only a social and legal predicament but also an "embodied and affectively charged condition of being" (Reeves, 2015). Deportability pushes the exiles to live "smaller lives"[23] where their plans and movements are limited due to the fear of being

[22] The revocability of citizenship and then being subject to deportability will be discussed later in this chapter. Although citizenship is something exiles pursue to secure themselves, it does not mean complete security after taking it.

[23] Thanks to Prem for suggesting this concept for me.

deported. One of my interlocutors told me that his wife wants to go to Mecca for Umrah with their Turkish passports. Although he wants to join her to practice the religious obligation, he told me that she can go but for him, it is not an option as he has over 20 years of sentences in Egypt. He implicitly mentioned that Saudi Arabia is a close ally of the Egyptian state, and he would not risk it. Affects are part of the whole process of taking citizenship as some exiles pray for God to take citizenship, celebrate taking it, and later develop a sense of connection to Turkey, as two of the interlocutors said that the lives of exiles are connected to the changes taking place in Turkey and Egypt. Agha (2023) describes how in her field site; an old Egyptian man showed her his newly acquired Turkish identity with a victorious look. The ID acts here as a "repository of hope" and a "valuable object" that signifies an achievement (Borisova, 2020). In brief, *jinsiya* is connected to affects such as fear, hope, and victory.

### 5.2. The Exception Opening the Limits: Hope or Precarity:

Many Egyptian exiles hope and pursue exceptional Turkish citizenship as they are not able to renew their passports through official ways (Abdelhamid, 2022; Agha, 2023)[24]. Many of my interlocutors have acquired exceptional citizenship which enabled them to pursue their academic degrees and other opportunities beyond Turkey. Hussein told me that his passport expired a couple of years ago and that he was able to extend it through a third country by paying money. He was accepted for an MA program in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, he was not able to travel by the passport extension he had. Once, he was talking to a professor in the program he got accepted into.

[24] The embassy's restrictions are not only in Turkey but also in other locations where many Egyptian exiles live such as Berlin (see Elsehamy, 2020).

The professor told him implicitly that he could join the program if he got another passport. The same person's life and opportunities depend on a new passport. Without this passport, his life would stop. It turns out to be even a matter of existential survival, "without a valid passport, I do not exist. Getting the citizenship means that I am coming back to life" (Abdelhamid, 2022, p.3). Hussein was lucky enough that later he got Turkish citizenship and was able to travel and finish his MA. I myself would not be able to study at CEU and write this thesis without a Turkish passport as my Egyptian passport expired in January 2024.

Based on his fieldwork among exiled Egyptians in Istanbul, Abdelhamid (2022) calls this phenomenon the 'hope for the exception'. Jansen (2014) argues that the hegemonic paradigm within anthropology is to understand the state through people's evasion of statecraft which is hope against the state. Abdelhamid follows Jansen's (2009, 2014) call to bring hope and statecraft together in order to understand the people's beliefs on the state's protection, provision, care, and improvement of the state. Abdelhamid steps further by examining hope for the exception of the state. An important note here is that the exception should not be understood in Schmidt's (1970/2008) or Agamben's (2003/2005) way where the sovereign suspends the law by a sovereign act. Rather, the exception in the Turkish case is a legal category in the hands of the authority. The authority chooses when to apply specific legal measures that are already there. So, the exception relies on the application of the measures. Besides, the exception here is a tool of inclusion (although selective) instead of exclusion as common in the literature on migration (see, for example, Davitti, 2018). The exception and the unclarity of the procedures make the exiles "hope for" instead of clearly working for it. "Systematic disorder", as someone expressed for

Abdelhamid, reveals the uncertainty of such a process (Abdelhamid, 2022, p.5). Then, how does this systematic part of the disorder work?

### 5.2.1. "The Turks like to deal with institutions": *Shillal* and Lists:

Unlike the randomness in the Syrian case where they are called to be interviewed, the Egyptians pursue citizenship through lists[25] provided to the Ministry of Interior that later go to the president. After the president's approval, the people receive an SMS inviting them to start the process. The lists contain the names of exiles with some of their personal information. *Mahjar* figures, who prepare the lists, try to show how the people on the list deserve/need citizenship using "sympathy" language as Ali told me (explained later in the humanitarian section). The Turkish authorities have opened communication channels with the early-arrived groups who were dominantly from the Muslim Brotherhood. As some expressed to me, these channels were sometimes based on previous interpersonal connections between Turkish and Egyptian figures. It was one of the reasons why people chose Turkey as a refuge in the first place.

Later, other associations were established in order to represent the Egyptian exiles such as Rabaa and later the Egyptian Diaspora (*al-Jaliya al-Misriya*). Such associations prepare those lists. Some lists take a more 'objective' way, e.g. parliament members' families, martyrs' families, and people with life sentences or the death penalty (Abdulhamid, 2022). The last two lists specifically show the humanitarian aspect of appealing to citizenship. Also, some Egyptian exiles formed informal

[25] Permanent residence work through the same process of lists.

syndicates based on professions like lawyers, media workers, and teachers. These syndicates prepare lists of citizenship as well (Abdin, 2023).

The Turkish authorities expressed that they prefer to deal with institutions or united groups instead of individuals. However, this situation leaves the individuals with low social capital abandoned. Two of my friends were advised by their naturalized friends to register in an association like t *al-Jaliya al-Misriya* or the media workers NGO to be able to get citizenship through the lists. Being an individual out of the *mahjar* networks would lead to being left behind.

Nevertheless, such institutions act like a "neo-tribe" (Maffesoli, 1996) as the relations are personalized and based on trust. Being an individual on his own or disagreeing with the 'representatives' leads to exclusion. One of my interlocutors told me that his withdrawal from the Muslim Brotherhood is the reason why he did not get citizenship until today. Some of the Muslim Brotherhood members were asking him to return to the organization to be included in the organization's citizenship lists. Another interlocutor told me that someone, he knows, erased his name from a citizenship list for unclear reasons.

Out of this frustration and the political neglect of the exiled elites, some exiles started initiatives based on "political friendship" (see Ezzat, 2022). Friendship usually has a good connotation compared to *shilla* (literally groups of friends in Egyptian Arabic) which acquires a negative connotation once it is used in political terms (Springborg, 1982). Some of my interlocutors refer to *shillaliya* (groupness) as a reason for their exclusion from citizenship lists. Salim who studied in Izmir, told me that there is a concept they use outside of Istanbul, "the people of Istanbul" as

something like a *shilla*. One of his friends told him, "You know, the people of Istanbul bring citizenship to each other". In that sense, people outside *shillal* (pl. of *shilla*) are excluded. The initiatives, based on political friendship, were formed to represent some of the marginalized and demand legalization of their situation (Abdelhamid, 2024).

However, all of this would never guarantee that someone would get citizenship. They are just potential channels that people pursue by registering with different associations to be included in their lists. The Turkish authorities decide who would get it. Some lists were accepted completely, others did not proceed completely, and some lists were accepted partially. In any case, there was no clear justification why this happened.

The process of citizenship acts in two ways: collectivization of the exiles into groups and then individualization in terms of the outcome of the procedure. It increases the uncertainty of the exiles who wish to be lucky. This dual process of collectivization and individualization leads to disparity within the family and the whole *mahjar* community. Within one family, there are Turkish citizens and others with no papers, touristic residence, or permanent residence. One of my interlocutors told me that his passport was expired but he got an "exceptional" permanent residence. However, his wife's touristic residence, due to the recent restrictions (explained later), expired and its renewal was rejected. The police check the papers everywhere, and people in similar situations create communication groups to warn each other about the police's location. Hence, the tightening policies and laws produce "illegality" (De Genova, 2002). One of my interlocutors told me that he and his whole family were on one of the lists, everybody got it except him. He heard that this happened because he turned 21 years old in the process which remains unclear reason for him.

Within the *mahjar* community, the resulting disparity of different legal categories weakens the possibility of building solidaristic networks to claim rights. People have different demands regarding their legal conditions. Some of my interlocutors perceived a*l-mujannasin* (literally naturalized people), especially the *mahjar* representatives, as less caring about others with no papers. This creates different realities based on the legal status. One of my interlocutors told me that his friends with no papers were pushed to work informally as cheap labor with minimum wage or less[26]. On the contrary, *al-mujannasin* would not think about such possible exploitation as they have the opportunity to work formally.

### 5.2.2. The (Dis-)Embeddedness of the Exception: "Uprooted grass"

Although people pursue citizenship through different ways, attaining citizenship does not provide a feeling of safety or certainty because "what came with a decision can go away with a decision" as many exiles expressed (Abdelhamid, 2022, p,6). One of my interlocutors told me that we do not know the law in Turkey and whether citizenship can be taken or not. The exiles do not understand the logic of the process, and some feel that it is based on luck or connections. This led my interlocutors to talk about citizenship briefly in the middle of a sentence, "Then, I got Turkish citizenship". Or many preferred to talk about it after I turned off the recording. It is something they earned vaguely, so some interlocutors keep it vague or secret. Checking the law shows that

[26] Neoliberal migration governance exploits the cheap labor of undocumented migrants (Marfleet, 2006; McNevin, 2006). In the case of Turkey, differential inclusion and tolerance of "irregular migrants' invisible presence" indicates the need for cheap and disposable labor in the Turkish economy (Yegen, 2022).

exceptional citizenship can be terminated or revoked because it is an administrative act that can revoked by a decree (Yildrim et al., 2020). The potential revocability combined with lack of knowledge pushes some of the exiles who got it to pursue "safer" and new citizenship outside Turkey, e.g., Europe or Brazil.

The exiles follow the geopolitical shifts and the rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt with a lot of concerns. The exiles circulated the story of a person whose citizenship was revoked and who later got it back when Erdogan was visiting Egypt for the first time after a decade. At this moment, "[Exiled] people discovered that citizenship can be revoked by an administrative act", as an interlocutor told me. Besides, the political atmosphere in Turkey influences the citizenship process. There are rising populist far-right parties that target migrants and refugees. These parties influence the whole political spectrum as the Turkish public becomes more concerned with migration. A year before the 2023 presidential elections, Turkey became so reluctant to issue touristic residence permits for many Egyptians. Many Egyptians have lived in Turkey for years with touristic residences. From early 2022 onward, the Turkish state rejected a lot of the Egyptian exiles' attempts to renew their touristic residency. Also, the exceptional citizenship process slowed down and then stopped by approaching the elections. Rumors were circulated about the stop due to the elections. Many of the exiles followed the Turkish presidential elections in 2023 with a lot of anxiety and fear. They were afraid if the anti-migrant opposition won, their citizenships would be revoked, as they got it through networks with AKP officials and unclear procedures.

The exiles hoped that the situation would get better after the election in May 2023. Nevertheless, the exceptional citizenship process remained stopped even during my fieldwork in April 2024.

Also, after Erdogan's re-election, he appointed a new cabinet. The new Minister of Interior started a campaign against undocumented migrants in July. The police were checking the migrants' papers randomly and intensively in the streets. Many Egyptian exiles expressed their stuckedness at their home for weeks as they were afraid of going to work because they lacked legal status which was tolerated before. Although Turkey claims that the target was only undocumented migrants, many reports show that many Syrians with official papers were deported to Syria (Oudeh, 2023). While laughing with dark humor, one of my interlocutors told me that, during this campaign, he received a call from a newly arrived Egyptian student. The student was shouting in panic that he was on the Turkish-Syrian border. The student forgot his passport and went out of his flat, then the Turkish police arrested him. The newly arrived student could not speak Turkish and was trying to tell the police that he was an Egyptian student, and his passport was in the flat. Because he spoke in Arabic, the officers thought that he was a Syrian without papers and decided to deport him to Northern Syria. The student managed to call my interlocutor before they crossed the border. My interlocutor, who has some connections, called someone in the Migration Management Authority who intervened and saved the Egyptian student. The officer told my interlocutor, "We will leave the guy here on the border, otherwise we might forget him there [in Syria]". The story shows the cruelty and absurdity of the campaign against migrants in Turkey. Besides, it shows the vitality of social capital as a survival tool during disturbances and ambiguity of the Turkish state.

These stories show the (dis-)embeddedness of the exiles in Turkey. (Dis)embeddedness refers to the (non-)access to resources of a specific context which is influenced by one's relations with the members in this context (Plüss, 2018). (Dis)embeddedness is also about (un-)familiarity with the institutional contexts (Harima, 2022). Many exiles got embedded formally in the state by getting

citizenship, allowing them to access resources, e.g., health care, voting, and job opportunities. Nevertheless, they remained disembedded due to their lack of knowledge about Turkish law, their rights, and the different social and political actors. Exiles remained strangers to different institutional and legal settings due to the continuous changes in Turkey's attitude toward them. Ali told me:

> "You cannot understand any pattern [in Turkey]. There is no consistent pattern that you can follow. There are citizenship lists, then stopped. Some are naturalized, others are not. Some can get humanitarian residence, sorry it stopped. Now, they are deporting people, no, there is an exception for Egyptians. Then, they are throwing Egyptians in Tuzla [foreigners' prison]. Then, they release them after a while. No, they need a lawyer. And so on… I feel that they deal with us like grass that can be uprooted at any time."

Citizenship represented an important step for embedding the exiles into society. However, many exiles remained disembedded from different legal, economic, and social settings. For example, Many struggled to equivalize their previous certificates, especially doctors, then they were forced to work informally. Referring to the social disembeddness, one of my interlocutors told me, "You can be a citizen but still be treated like a refugee". A refugee-like citizen without the benefits and support of being a refugee. But why do the exiles (citizens or not) not claim more rights and demand more embeddedness?

### 5.2.3. Humanitarian Subjects: "We are guests here":

In one of my interviews, I asked Salama, who was an organizer of different protests against Egypt's military coup, about the frequency of the protests in Turkey. He told me that it started to decrease with the Egypt-Turkey rapprochement and then stopped. He continued that he understands Turkey's motives and interests. He ended his answer by saying, "We are guests here". Although he became a Turkish citizen, he internalized the humanitarian discourse imposed on refugees and exiles. He accepted the limits of his own right to protest, even if protesting the military regime in Egypt. On the contrary, other exiles on humanitarian or touristic residences that can be rejected at any time claim their rights by protesting and being vocal on social media. Acts of citizenship go beyond citizen and non-citizen binary.

Many scholars discussed how humanitarian discourses tend to depoliticize migration from its social and political contexts (Malkki, 1996, Rajaram, 2002; Geiger & Pécoud, 2013; Pallister-Wilkins, 2022). Rather migration should be understood in relation to global inequality and political oppression, e.g., in the case of exile. Sevinin (2019, 2022) argues that Turkey's humanitarian discourse of benevolence and hospitality toward Syrian refugees led to the neglect and immobilization of refugees' rights and rights claims. Sevinin (2022) argues that the Syrian "refugee crisis" was (de-politicized), moralized, and humanitarianized through an Islamic humanitarianist discourse employing words such as *Ansar-Muhajirin* and host-guest. Hence, contradictions emerged out of such discourse: unifying both based on abstract and symbolic equality, while at the same time reproducing social and political hierarchies and asymmetries between the dependent victim and the ameliorative actor. This tension between abstract religious

similarity and situated difference gave space for maneuvering and deciding to whom compassion and aid would be mobilized.

My focus here is how some exiles got subjectified and internalized Turkey's humanitarian discourse. Most, if not all, of my interlocutors understand exceptional citizenship in humanitarian terms. Hence, only people in danger who cannot go back to Egypt deserve exception. Some exiles expressed their disappointment that some Egyptians acquired it and then went back to Egypt without facing any problems. Being in danger means someone deserves and is entitled to exceptional citizenship. However, those who got it kept a feeling of lack of entitlement to claim rights as a citizen because they got it exceptionally and out of the compassion of the Turkish officials. Some older interlocutors expressed gratitude toward the state of Turkey for granting them citizenship. This gratitude was personified in the Turkish officials or Erdogan. Once I wrote a post on my Facebook criticizing some of Turkey's policies, and then I received messages from an old exile rebuking me for criticizing the only country opened for me and other Egyptian exiles. Then, he added: "When I am your guest, it is not polite to criticize food or furniture".

Ali told me that many Turkish officials follow what happened in Egypt from imprisonment and martyrdom of activists. So, some of the exiles appealed to the "Turks' sympathy" by talking about their sufferings individually or collectively. Another interlocutor told me that she entered Turkey illegally, and once she arrived in Turkey, she went to the Migration Authority and told them how she entered there. "They treated us like humans here [compared to Egypt], although we entered in a wrong manner". This confession and seeking compassion represent "pastoral power" (Foucault, 1982). Pastoral power entangled with political power plays a role in humanitarianism and

migration management (Walters, 2011; Ioannidis et al., 2021). Pastoral power is exercised over living individuals while political power produces legal subjects. Pastoral power is about caring and extracting the truth of the "flock" through individualizing them. I mentioned before how the citizenship process is both collectivizing and individualizing. Also, the pastoral power is manifested through the reproaching messages sent by the Turkish officials expressing their "anger" or "disappointment" at knowing that some exiles may exploit their benevolence. Two of my interlocutors told me stories that Turkish officials are unsatisfied with people pursuing other citizenship or traveling back to Egypt emphasizing that they will be stricter in checking who deserves in the future.

The expansion of applying exceptional measures of the law (e.g., citizenship or permanent residence) to fill the gaps in the Turkish legal system (e.g., inadequacy to deal with humanitarian crises and refugees) was crucial and represented hope for many refugees and exiles. Utilizing the exception with its humanitarian discourse instead of introducing a better legal framework did not offer closure or certainty for the migrants. Besides, it took their agency away transforming them into "humanitarian subjects" (Cabot, 2019) waiting or hoping for help. Some exiles feel less entitled to claim their rights or criticize their benevolent host. "You are a citizen", was a phrase directed to a naturalized exile asking about citizenship from a Turkish businessman. My interlocutor who was there, told me the story while reflecting on it by saying, "We [exiles] should act accordingly with this logic of being right holders".

### 5.3. Conclusion: Differential Inclusion:

The Egyptian exiles hoped for the exception to legalize their own unclear legal situation. The exiles hoped for a passport that allows them to move freely inside or outside Turkey to pursue their life trajectories[27]. However, the exception does not turn out to be the norm, the exception has limits and is temporal. Besides, the exception creates a differential inclusion (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Van Baar, 2016; O'Brien, 2019) in which many are excluded, especially those who lack social capital. The different statuses (e.g., citizenship or permanent residence) offered and later withheld "ranging from fully legal to semi-legal to illegal(ised), translate into significant political and socio-economic stratifications." (O'Brien, 2019, p.43). Tightening the exception measures "strongly stimulate "voluntary" return without enacting more costly deportation procedures" (Van Baar, 2016, p.223). That is why many exiles started to think about leaving Turkey under these tightening legal conditions.

Turkey's humanitarianism creates a "humanitarian border" where alienation and care, protection and social sorting, or abjection and reception function at the same time (Walters, 2011). The humanitarian logic works to subjectify exiles into humanitarian subjects regardless of their legal status. Also, it pushes any responsibility away from the Turkish state that offered the exception as a matter of benevolence and could take it away at any time. For the Egyptian exiles, the fear of revocability and the vagueness of the citizenship process create precarity and push people to seek



[27] Turkish citizenship or permanent residence may act later as obstacles for people who do not feel safe and secure in Turkey and pursue seeking asylum in a Western country. An interlocutor told me a story about a friend who sought asylum in Germany, but his application failed. The justification was that his friend had permanent residence in Turkey which was seen by the German authorities as safe for him.

alternative ways outside Turkey. So, Turkey turns out to be a transit for legal concerns; besides, economic problems and rising racism (in Epilogue).

It is worth mentioning in times of the rise of xenophobic parties in Turkey that humanitarian logic is better than anti-migrant restrictive policies. I deconstruct humanitarianism as part of the power structures that should be criticized. Turkey's Humanitarianism represents a refuge and hope for a lot of refugees and exiles who feel entrapped and lacking options. For individuals, humanitarianism, although selective, is better than nothing. I criticize humanitarianism's subjectification and hierarchization wishing that Turkey should offer better frameworks where more marginalized are included as equal right-claiming citizens.

## Epilogue

The stories of the exiles did not start with the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, rather it started at least a decade before, when big political events occurred globally and regionally. It was different interacting factors that contributed to their politicization and engagement with politics. Protests in solidarity with Palestine among other global events and joining the MB offered spaces for interactions. My younger interlocutors narrated their politicization as a result of the Mubarak regime's oppression mediated through their families. The formed networks of my older interlocutors and the politicized families of the younger ones in that period would continue to influence their trajectories after the military coup forced them to escape. These networks would guide their escape until arriving in Turkey. These networks were transformed into a *mahjar* community that would help them navigate through the legal structures of Turkey.

I argued for the richness of "exile" as a concept that fosters individual and collective experiences without neglecting the political conditions in Egypt. The exiles faced new structural conditions in their destination rising from the absence of an "exile" legal status. I showed that exiles navigated different possible legal statuses: as tourists, humanitarian residents, potential "refugees" in Western countries, and/or Turkish citizens. I argued that Syrian migration pushed Turkey to adopt changes in migration laws and citizenship policies that the exiles would follow. Defining "Turkish" citizenship through examining the marginalized Kurds and later the differential inclusion of the Syrians, paved the way for a better understanding of exiles' hopes for exceptional Turkish citizenship. The exiles pursued exceptional citizenship through their *mahjar* networks, aiming for a sense of stability. In that sense, citizenship as an affective document represented a

possibility to overcome fears of stuckedness and entrapment. Nevertheless, I argued that "taking citizenship" embodied new anxieties and uncertainties about its revocability. The exiles' rights-claiming was immobilized due to their disembeddedness from society and being humanitarian subjects who depended on Turkey's benevolence.

Furthermore, due to such uncertainties and anxieties regarding their legality, coupled with the deteriorating economy and rising racism, many exiles expressed that they consider leaving Turkey if they can. For example, an exile expressed his will to leave but he feels stuck, "I was planning to leave to a respectable destination like Canada or the US, but since my passport expired the temporary turned out to be permanent.".

In Czaika & Reinprecht's (2023) comprehensive literature review on migration drivers, they found that only 1% of the studies examined migration drivers in transit countries. In my research, Turkey was perceived as temporal in two ways. Firstly, in the beginning, many exiles held the hope that the political situation would change in Egypt and that they would go back there. This hope started to vanish through time as many expressed. Secondly, temporal was seen as equal to transit. The majority of interviewees perceived Turkey as a transit even those who got Turkish citizenship. One of my interlocutors mentioned that "Turkey is a transitional zone by nature, to or from another place, even for Turkish people.". Another one, who has lived in Istanbul for almost ten years, mentioned "Every year, I try to travel from Turkey, but still there is no alternative. Turkey is not a sustainable destination, materially (financially) speaking.".

Abdin & Hisam (2022) found a negative relationship between age and perceiving Turkey as a transit. Even within one family, two mothers mentioned that they prefer to stay in Turkey until they have the opportunity to go back to Egypt; nevertheless, they mentioned that their children argue against them and prefer Europe where they can have better education, job opportunities, and a "good passport". According to Abdin & Hisam, this difference can be explained by the different resources and opportunities that each age group perceives. For instance, old exiles mentioned their well-settled Arab communities or cultural factors like Turkey being a Muslim-majority country as reasons to stay. One of my interlocutors who later managed to leave told me, "Turkey for me is a transitional station until I get better opportunities in the US, Canada, or Europe. Because of the hardship of finding a job as an Arab, I have limited opportunities. He also mentioned that he does not "feel safe with the rise of racism."

I believe that transit countries should be studied more. "Transit" is very connected to the migration project and the migrants' hopes. Migrants perceive transit as the best that they can have for now because of their limited resources and abilities for mobility. Exiles try to accumulate different forms of capital in "transit" to be back on the move. Some try to work and collect money to move to Europe legally or illegally. Others study to accumulate cultural capital which would facilitate their next destination. Also, "transit" is not something necessarily pre-determined and perceived from the beginning. Many migrants adjust their plans and decide to leave again after what they experience in the country. Turkey is (and will be in the future), a very interesting case for being a transit and crossing country for many Arabs, Afghans, Iranians, Russians, Ukrainians, and others, which is opening the way for future questions: "How do different groups of exiles and migrants perceive Turkey differently as a transit?", "How does minorities and migrants contribute the

changing meanings of Turkey's citizenship?", and lastly, "What are the new strategies migrants and exiles in Turkey would navigate in the near future to overcome challenges imposed by the legal, social, and economic structures in Turkey?".

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