THE MATERIALITY OF EXILE: WOMEN EXILES AND POSTCOLONIAL STATE VIOLENCE IN THE MENA REGION

By

Rawda Elaskary

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Critical Gender Studies

Supervisor: Nadia Jones-Gailani

Vienna, Austria

Copyright Notice

Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, **Rawda Elaskary**, candidate for the MA degree in Critical Gender Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis titled The Materiality of Exile: Women Exiles and Postcolonial State Violence in the MENA Region is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright.

I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 30 May 2025

Rawda Elaskary

Abstract

This thesis critically re-theorizes exile by centering the material, gendered, and carceral realities of Egyptian women activists who were exiled following the 2013 military coup. Using Biopolitics and Necropolitics as frameworks, the study challenges Edward Said's metaphorical framing of exile as a space of critical reflection and foregrounds exile as a material condition produced through state violence. Through 33 interviews with Egyptian women activists in exile, he thesis demonstrates the violent, material conditions that lead to Egyptian women's exile, including carceral violence, torture, sexual and gender-based violence in detention, and the various technologies of discipline of women's bodies in prisons through the control over the administration of food, water, space, air, light, and the production of illness and death-worlds through lack of hygiene and medical neglect. The thesis also examines how the Egyptian state mobilizes its sovereign power through multiple registers to produce forced exile at sites of transition, including airports, border zones, and embassies. By reframing exile as a material and gendered reality, the thesis contributes to decolonial feminist scholarship and activism by exposing how postcolonial state authoritarianism, rather than Western imperialism alone, produces the condition of exile in the MENA region.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and solidarity of many individuals whom I am deeply grateful for. First and foremost, I wish to thank all the women whose testimonies made this thesis possible. Though their names remain absent, their words are the heart of this work. This research is dedicated to their courage, resilience, and resistance.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Nadia Jones-Gailani, for her generous intellectual guidance and steady encouragement throughout this process.

I am especially grateful to my friend Shadi Mandani, whose academic support, critical reflection, and friendship held me through moments of doubt and exhaustion. Shadi, this thesis would not have been possible without you.

My deep thanks go as well to my dearest friend Ali Guibril, whose emotional support carried me through some of the most difficult periods of this journey. Thank you for always being here and reminding me that friendship is what one can always lean on, even through geographical distance and borders.

I extend my utmost gratitude to my friend Amir Eid. Thank you for our long late-night conversations, your continuous encouragement and belief in me, and your sense of humor that never fails to cheer me up.

I would also like to thank Ahmed Attallah, my former manager at the Egyptian Front for Human Rights, who has been a professional mentor for many years. Your guidance, trust, and steadfast belief in me, both personal and professional, have been vital to my development as a researcher and activist.

Table of contents

Introduction

The political transformations ushered in by the Arab Spring were met with counter-revolutionary forces across the MENA region from the outset. In Egypt, the 2013 military coup toppled the first democratically elected president, Muslim Brotherhood (MB) member Mohamed Morsi. Under the pretext of the war on terror, the new military regime enacted "a new authoritarianism" (Hamzawy, 2017, p. 392), through "a permanent state of exception" where mass murder, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture became a feature of everyday life (Agambem 2008; Amnesty International, 2019). As a result, an unprecedented wave of political exile ensued, starting with Islamists in 2013, and extending to more liberal and leftist political groups in 2014 (Dunne, 2019), and finally to women and LGBTQ+ persons in 2017 after a violent crackdown on the LGBTQ+ community (HRW, 2020).

This thesis critically examines the material, gendered, and carceral realities of exile as experienced by Egyptian women activists forcibly displaced by the post-2013 Egyptian state. While Edward Said's metaphorical framing of exile as a site of critical consciousness remains influential, this thesis argues that such conceptualizations obscure the violent and material conditions under which exile is imposed. Drawing on 33 interviews with exiled Egyptian women activists, it reconceptualizes exile not as a metaphor but as a material condition produced through postcolonial state violence.

Critiquing Said's theory for its abstraction and gender blindness, I offer a framework grounded in biopolitics, necropolitics, and bare life instead. I then explore how torture and sexual and gender-based violence function as mechanisms of expulsion, forcing women into exile, and examine the carceral system's regulation of women's bodies through deprivation of food, water, space, air, and healthcare, producing conditions of slow death. I finally trace how

state violence extends into borderlands such as airports, border zones, and embassies, causing an ontological moment of rupture that turns women activists into exiles.

By centering women's testimonies, this thesis reframes exile as a gendered and material reality rather than a metaphorical or intellectual stance. It contributes to feminist, carceral, and postcolonial studies by bridging activist narratives with critical theory and foregrounding the embodied costs of dissent under military dictatorships and authoritarian rule.

Contextual background

The January 25, 2011 Egyptian revolution marked a historical turning point in the country's political landscape and women's visibility and participation in public life and organizing. Egyptian women were at the forefront of the revolution, as key actors in organizing, mobilizing, and occupying spaces in the Tahrir Square and the mobilizations after the 18 days of the revolution.. While their participation challenged the established norms of gender and politics, it was soon met with violent backlash.

During the eighteen days of protest in January and February 2011, women of all backgrounds, veiled and unveiled, young and old, from different economic and social classes, participated in mass numbers. They not only stood side by side with men in demonstrations but also coordinated medical care, managed supplies, and acted as frontline defenders against state violence (Abdel-lateef, 2013). Their physical presence in Tahrir Square (temporarily) suspended gender boundaries and was widely seen as a transformative moment for gender relations in Egypt (Abdel-Fadil, 2014).

Prominent female figures like Asmaa Mahfouz, whose viral video helped spark the revolution, became known to many as the "leader of the revolution" and symbolized a broader movement in which ordinary women asserted their agency (Al-Ali, 2012). Constrained by patriarchal norms and security risks, many women turned to alternative forms of participation,

particularly online activism and journalism, using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and blogs for feminist organizing and challenging state narratives. An example of this was Islam Online Arabic (IOL), which reported from *Tahrir* and highlighted marginalized voices (Abdel-Fadil, 2014). But it was not limited to organizations or famous women figures; many unknown women also played vital roles in grassroots organizing, communication, and mutual aid initiatives (Meari et al., 2015).

However, women's bodies were used as vehicles of state and male violence in pulic life and protests. Sexual violence, especially during mass protests, became a deliberate tool for state oppression. From 2011 to 2014, feminist NGOs documented over 500 cases of sexual assault, harassment, and gang rapes in and around Tahrir Square both by security forces and by civilian mobs, often incited or enabled by the state (Raway, 2024). On 8 March 2011, International Women's Day, a few hundred women gathered in a demonstration that was attacked by angry men, shoving them and yelling at them to go back home (Coleman, 2011).

These violent tactics served a dual purpose: to punish women for participating in public protests and to deter future activism by reinforcing patriarchal norms. At the same time, the intersecting structures of authoritarianism and patriarchy turned the female body into a contested political site. While the military had impunity for violence against women, women were often blamed for the violence committed against them through narratives of shame and honor (Heijthuyzen, 2018; Zakarriya, 2019). In 2013, members of Egypt's Shura Council explicitly blamed women protesters for the violence they faced, suggesting they bore "100 percent responsibility" for being in unsafe environments (Abdel-lateef, 2013). Specific incidents, however, challenged these narratives to some extent.

In one of the most infamous disciplinary tactics, on March 9, 2011, the military arrested 18 women in Tahrir Square. Seventeen were detained, beaten, subjected to electric shocks, and forced to undergo so-called virginity tests. These tests were justified by state officials,

including then-General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, under the pretext of protecting the army from accusations of rape (Tadros, 2016) but served to both discipline and discredit women's political agency (Gilbert, 2021). Samira Ibrahim, one of the detainees who was subject to virginity tests, later filed a lawsuit against the military, bringing national and international attention to the abuse. Although the military doctor was eventually acquitted and no high-ranking officials were held accountable, Ibrahim's courage in publicizing the case galvanized feminist and human rights communities in Egypt and abroad and drew attention to women's right on bodily autonomy and integrity as one of the main goals of the revolution (Abdel-lateef, 2013; Wahba, 2016).

Another emblematic moment was the brutal public assault of an anonymous female protester who came to be known as the girl in the blue bra. During a military crackdown on a sit-in at Tahrir Square in December 2011, soldiers were filmed dragging the unconscious woman across the pavement, kicking her, and stripping away her abaya to expose her blue bra. The video of the assault went viral and sparked a wave of protests against military abuses (Hafez, 2014).

Despite these, women were largely excluded from transitional political bodies in post-revolutionary political life and faced renewed restrictions under the new regime. These restrictions also intensified feminist consciousness and solidarity. Many women began a critique that linked gender violence with broader state authoritarianism and neoliberal policies, a perspective that remains central in feminist discourse in Egypt today (Heijthuyzen, 2018).

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, women's activism underwent significant diversification. Some engaged in formal political processes, constitutional debates, and elections, and others focused on joining or founding organizations to address sexual violence, promote legal reforms, and hold the state accountable. Organizations like *Nazra for Feminist Studies* and the *New Woman Foundation*, which were founded in 2007, expanded the scope of

their activities and produced critical research, provided legal aid, and advocated for legislative reform. Nazra became active in monitoring elections from a gender perspective and training women for political participation, while the New Woman Foundation focused on workplace rights and eliminating sexual harassment in employment settings, linking economic justice with gender equity (Raway, 2024).

Formed in 2011, *Women and Constitution Group* was formed by a coalition of feminist NGOs, human rights organizations, and activists, whose activities led to the inclusion of gender equity provisions in the constitutional framework and significantly influenced the drafting of Egypt's new constitution (Zakarriya, 2019). Initiatives such as OpAntiSH (Operation Anti Sexual Harassment), Tahrir Bodyguard, and Imprint Movement emerged in 2011-2012. They used public and media platforms to document assaults, share self-defense strategies with women, and disseminate knowledge about legal processes (Zakarriya, 2019).

Another key player in Egypt's feminist and political activism is *Baheya Ya Masr*. Emerged after 2011, this political activist movement focused on confronting not only gender-based oppression but also broader social and political injustices. *Baheya Ya Masr* has been notable for its intersectional approach, linking women's rights with demands for democratic reforms and social justice, and its direct engagement in grassroots mobilization and public protests (Sami, 2015).

However, the crackdown on civil society following the 2013 military coup and subsequent NGO law (Law 70/2017) severely constrained feminist organizing. While some groups, such as the New Woman Foundation, have continued operations within Egypt under increasing surveillance, others, like parts of Nazra's team, have either ceased activities or relocated partially to work in exile or from diaspora networks (Zakarriya, 2019).

Literature Review

Middle Eastern diasporas have long acted as critical actors in home and host countries' politics, acting as arbiters in conflict resolution, peace-making processes, development, new media activism, and international transitional justice mechanisms (Baser, 2017; Baser & Halperin, 2019) with Middle Eastern governments responding through transnational repression and targeting diaspora activism (Moss, 2016). Academic studies on Palestinian (Halperin, 2018), Syrian (Caruso, 2018; Ragab & Katbeh, 2018), Iranian (Michaelsen, 2018), and Iraqi (Al-Ali, 2007; Kadhum, 2021) diasporas reveal how exile activism is shaped by both opportunities and restraints in host countries, simultaneously empowered by transnational networks and constrained by state surveillance, legal precarity, and the emotional toll of forced displacement. Further studies suggest that exile and diaspora activism, which proliferated globally even more in the wake of the Arab Spring (Moss, 2016), reconfigure Middle Eastern exile subjectivities from those of dysphoric or suffering (Elsehamy, 2020) to those of revolutionary subjects and change-makers (Baser & Halperin, 2019).

Egyptian exiles' activism is part of this long tradition of Middle Eastern diasporas' mobilization in exile. After the unprecedented wave of political exile following the 2013 military coup, the Egyptian state, similar to the other Meadle Eastern states, continued to target and harass the exiled dissidents, journalists, and activists in the UK, Germany, Qatar, Malaysia, and Turkey by refusing to issue or renew their identity documents, such as passports, national IDs, and birth certificates, putting them and their children at risk of statelessness (Magdy, 2023). France24 (2021) reports on how Egyptian exiled activists continue to face threats and intimidation from their home government ten years after the revolution.

While scholarly literature on this topic is still emerging, several studies have begun to explore the contours of Egyptian exile activism, repression, and the formation of subjectivity. For instance, Mandour (2022) examined the role of Egyptian exiles since 2013 in organizing

using a human rights-based framework globally, outlining major forms of organizing and activism in exile, notably knowledge production, building coalitions and networks, human rights advocacy, and leveraging international law and national laws in host countries. Dunne and Hamzawy (2019) examine the effects of the post-2013 wave of exile on Egypt, the two most notable of which are the proliferation of human rights advocacy and media outlets in exile. Their work examines the geographical dispersion of exiles, their political activism abroad, and the Egyptian government's transnational repression tactics.

Yefet (2024) analyzes Egypt's diaspora policies post-2013, arguing that the Sisi regime actively engages with its diaspora to maintain political legitimacy. Yefet conceptualizes diaspora management as a tool of authoritarian consolidation, wherein the state employs both coercive and co-optative strategies to regulate Egyptian communities abroad (2024). In a study of Egyptian exiles in Berlin, Elsehamy (2020) examines the formation of their political subjectivity. Elsehamy examines the "state of being on the run in Egypt" (2020, p. 12) as a means of escaping the necropolitics of terror in Egypt and the "affective atmospheres of terror" (2020, p. 23) created by the Egyptian state against exiles in Berlin. Elsehamy conceptualizes Egyptian exiles in Berlin as dysphoric subjects, occupying a borderland of uncertainty, in-betweenness, and transition (2020, p. 3). In a study on Egyptians exiles in England, McKeever traces the change of exile's activism between Egypt and England, arguing that the exile's move to England expanded their political opportunity and mobilising structures, as they arguably "became embedded within a much richer political context replete with representatives, allies and established procedures for voicing political claims" (2019, p. 187). McKeever also stresses that exile is not a singular moment of rupture but a process marked by ongoing fear, negotiation, and transformation (2019).

These contributions, however, often focus on male activists and journalists or examine exile as a broad phenomenon without accounting for gendered experiences of exile. There is,

therefore, a significant gap in the scholarship on women political exiles, particularly in the context of post-2013 Egypt. This gap is especially striking given the centrality of gender and sexuality to the making of the new revolutionary subjectivity that emerged during and after the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. Several studies show how women's bodies became battlefields and sites of resistance in the discursive formation of the revolutionary national subject (Al-Ali, 2012; Hafez, 2014; Jabiri, 2017; Meari et al., 2015; Mourad, 2014; Sami, 2015). In an article published by the *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights* (EIPR), Dalia Abd El-Hameed (2016) examines how the Egyptian state has instrumentalized the discourse on women's rights, employing selective policies to promote a state-approved version of feminism while suppressing independent feminist organizing. In 2013, the grassroots movement, *Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment*, argued that the attacks against women protesters in Tahrir Square were not incidental but part of a broader state strategy to intimidate women out of the public sphere and limit their political participation.

This thesis aims to address the gap in scholarship by centering the experiences of Egyptian women in exile. It examines the gendered dimesntions of exile, thereby contributing to a more intersectional understanding of exile politics and the gendered repression in post-2013 Egypt.

Methodology

The methodology of this thesis depends on semi-structured interviews with 33 Egyptian women in exile. I interviewed 27 of these women between 2021 and 2022 as part of my work with the Egyptian Front for Human Rights and obtained the organization's consent to use the interviews as part of my master's thesis (Please see Annex). I conducted six additional semi-structured interviews with Egyptian women in exile in 2022 for the purpose of this thesis. All the interviews were conducted online via Signal, WhatsApp, or Zoom and adhered to informed

consent guidelines. The interviews were conducted in Arabic. I used ChatGPT to translate interview materials from Arabic to English, and I fact-checked the translation to ensure accuracy.

The thesis covers the period from 2013 to 2022. The women interviewed are exiled in geographically diverse locations, with the most significant number of exiles residing in Turkey. Other women exiles interviewed were based in Qatar, Tunisia, Germany, the USA, Sweden, Belgium, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, France, and North Korea.

All the women I interviewed have been engaged in political activism and were targeted by the Egyptian state and exiled because of their activism. They are human rights advocates, political activists, researchers, journalists, and writers. The women are politically diverse and come from different backgrounds across the political spectrum - the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamist current, the 6th of April Movement, the liberal and leftist currents, the student movement, the human rights movement, and the feminist movement, as well as independent media and political voices, who all took to the public sphere in a more organized manner after the 25th of January Egyptian Revolution.

The first set of interviews was conducted in a less structured manner. After discussing informed consent, I would begin the interviews with more general questions about their reasons for leaving Egypt, their fears about returning, and what led them to decide that returning was no longer an option. I started getting the same answers: prison, torture, carceral violence, police harassment, surveillance at airports. I then developed my interview guide based on the answers I received, but kept it flexible enough to accommodate different responses from other interviewees. Broadly, the interview questions covered: reasons that led Egyptian women to forced exile, torture, sexual and gender-based violence in the carceral system, inhumane conditions of detention, food, water, overcrowding, overexposure to light, lack of hygiene, lack

of healthcare, as well as state repression in borderlands or areas of transit: airports, border areas, and embassies.

Positionality

Following England's (1994) insight that feminist reflexivity is an ethical, political, and relational practice, I will take a moment to reflect on my positionality in relation to my research participants.

I am an Egyptian woman, born to a Muslim Brotherhood family, and have lived in exile myself for 5 years. My father and brother were arrested and detained in the aftermath of the 2013 Rabaa Massacre, a state-led massacre in which more than a thousand Egyptians were killed during a violent dispersal of a sit-in protesting the military coup. These experiences are not just part of my biography; they structure my political consciousness, ethical commitments, and epistemological orientation.

I worked for 7 years as a human rights researcher on Egypt, focusing on political prisoners and SGBV, during which I built close relationships with prisoners, their families, and lawyers. Many of my friends and members of my community were imprisoned themselves. Those who managed to leave Egypt live in exile. This is to say that the topic of this thesis rings very close to home, and that I am an insider to the community I work with for this thesis, which has allowed me to access and speak with women exiles from different political leanings. I thus do not claim to speak from a place of neutrality. As feminist standpoint theory reminds us, all knowledge is produced from somewhere (Harding, 2004). My "somewhere" is deeply entangled with the history and present I trace in this thesis. My aim is not to overcome this entanglement but to name it, stay accountable to it, and use it to produce knowledge that is politically committed and represents the voices of the women I spoke to.

Following Deblasio's (2022) call for trauma-informed feminist research, I conducted interviews with attention to affect, safety, and care. I allowed participants to pause, reframe, or refuse. As the interviews covered sensitive and traumatic topics such as torture and sexual and gender-based violence, I grounded my methodological approach in the ethics of care and mutual recognition, following Caswell and Cifor (2019). I allowed my participants the space to pause, talk, or reframe. I gave them as much or as little space as they indicated and remained sensitive to their wishes. I stayed in touch with them and checked in on them after the interviews.

I approach this research as a survivor of police violence and as a human rights researcher who has spent seven years documenting political imprisonment and carceral violence in Egypt. These overlapping identities (researcher, survivor, exile, activist) position me both as an insider and an outsider in relation to my participants. I share with them the burdens of displacement, surveillance, and political grief, but my own particularities also shape me. Drawing on Mohanty's (2003) critique of Western feminism's tendency to flatten Third World women's experiences into homogenous categories, I treat the experiences of the women I spoke to as situated, intersectional, and historically contingent, that is, I continuously seek to position them within their own "local" context of power relations, for lack of a better word.

This is informed by feminist reflexivity and decolonial thought, particularly Smith's (2012) insight that research involving marginalized communities must be accountable to their worldviews, vocabularies, and modes of resistance. Although I share the language and context of many of my participants, I remain aware of my responsibility in translating their experiences into academic discourse, often in English, for audiences largely removed from their realities.

Drawing on Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of the "borderlands", a space of contradiction, hybridity, and painful crossings, I view my positionality as shaped by multiple, often conflicting, locations. This in-between space is not a methodological weakness but a source of

epistemic insight. It allows me to ask questions that are grounded in lived struggle and to hear silences that might otherwise be overlooked.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured into four main chapters following the Introduction, beginning with a chapter on my theoretical framework, which critically examines and reframes the dominant theoretical paradigm of exile. Drawing on Edward Said's seminal work, Chapter One engages with his conceptualization of exile as a metaphor for a privileged epistemological position that enables critical reflection. I argue that his framework, centered on the exiled intellectual, obscures the material and gendered realities of exile. Through a feminist and postcolonial critique, I show how Said's formulation overlooks the embodied, affective, and carceral experiences that shape exile for Egyptian women activists. Instead, I draw on the frameworks of biopolitics from Foucault and necropolitics from Mbembe to propose a reconceptualization of exile not as a metaphorical vantage point but as a condition forcibly imposed through gendered state violence, carceral control, and the sovereign power to exclude.

Building on this reconceptualization, Chapter Two investigates how torture and sexual and gender-based violence operate as foundational mechanisms in the production of exile. Through detailed testimonies of former Egyptian women activists, the chapter exposes how the state employs torture, physical, psychological, and sexual, not as isolated aberrations but as systematic techniques of power. These acts of violence target the body as a political site of discipline, coercion, and erasure. The chapter further contends that sexualized state violence is a key technology through which women are rendered vulnerable to exile. Rather than positioning exile as a space of critical insight, this chapter reveals it as a brutal necessity; a last resort in the face of bodily destruction and sovereign terror.

Chapter Three extends this analysis by examining the disciplinary architecture of women's prisons in Egypt. It focuses on the administration and control of women's bodies within prison walls through food, water, space, air, light, hygiene, and healthcare, as technologies of biopolitical and necropolitical control. Drawing on extensive field testimonies, the chapter examines how the prison operates not merely to detain but also to exhaust, degrade, and incapacitate. It reveals how the carceral state manages survival while orchestrating structural exposure to disease and death. Importantly, this chapter foregrounds the production of abjection and death within prison as central to the process of exile, arguing that the exile condition begins well before the moment of departure. Exile emerges here as a spatial and temporal extension of carceral governance, as the Egyptian state renders exclusion from citizenship the only survival option available to women activists, effectively turning critics into exiles.

Chapter Four shifts the focus to the borderlands of exile, airports, border zones, transnational routes, and embassies, to trace how the Egyptian state extends its repressive power beyond its territorial boundaries to target women activists. Women's testimonies reveal how the Egyptian state uses airports as sites of surveillance and repression, enforces arbitrary travel bans and arrival watchlists on women activists, already survivors of carceral violence, forcing them into illegal escape routes. This chapter conceptualizes these sites as necro-borderlands, zones where the state governs mobility through abandonment, illegality, and exposure to danger. The chapter also reveals the Egyptian state's transnational gendered repression against women activists in exile through its embassies and consulates. The chapter argues that exile here is produced through material regimes of state violence exercised in such borderlands, causing an ontological rupture, turning women activists into exile subjects under gendered regimes of fear, violence, and exclusion.

Together, these chapters argue for an understanding of exile as a condition rooted in material and gendered state violence. The thesis challenges the epistemic romanticization of exile. Istead, it foregrounds an embodied, materialist approach of forced exile in the Egyptian context. By employing a biopolitical and necropolitical approach,, exile is reconceptualized not as a metaphor, but a condition of violent materiality, one that begins in the prison, extends beyond the national border, and lingers in the exile's present.

Chapter One

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the prevailing theoretical understanding of exile as conceptualized by Edward Said, particularly his view of exile as metaphorical and a critical consciousness and reflection for the exiled intellectual. I argue that Said's focus on the exiled intellectual neglects the material and gender-specific realities of exile. I demonstrate how his perspective fails to account for the lived, emotional, and carceral experiences that define exile for Egyptian women activists and I propose, instead, a more substantive understanding of exile, using Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necropolitics. This framework conceptualizes exile as a condition forcibly inflicted by gendered state violence, prison control, and the sovereign power to exclude and not as a critical metaphorical experience.

1.1 Conceptual Framework: Exile between the Metaphorical and the Material

Exile is one of the most persistent and richly theorized conditions in modern intellectual and political life. The work of Edward Said on exile has been highly influential in this field. In this chapter, I engage directly with Said's framework, centering his influential account of exile as a privileged position for the exiled intellectual, while also critically interrogating its limits, especially in relation to the material realities, gendered experiences, and specific histories of Egyptian women activists. My aim is to foreground the gap between the metaphorical and the material and argue for a conception of exile rooted in embodied, historical, and political

realities, especially as they relate to state violence and gendered repression in contemporary Egypt.

Edward Said's theorization of exile is best understood as a paradox. On the one hand, he elevates exile to a metaphorical and epistemological vantage point. In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Said defines exile as "an unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" (2002, p. 173). This rift is not merely geographic, but existential and intellectual. Said views exile as enabling a critical distance, cultural hybridity, and resistance to dominant power structures. It is, for him, a unique metaphorical space that allows the exiled intellectual to reflect on two simultaneous realities and epistemologies, embodying a form of critical consciousness (Alwaqaa, 2025).

For Said, exile is not a transient condition, but a permanent state, an ontological shift that marks those who have been uprooted, compelling them to carry a lasting sense of dislocation, alienation, and dissonance, even as they attempt to build new lives in new places. This permanence is, for Said, what differentiates exile from other forms of movement or displacement, such as expatriation or temporary asylum (Lal, 2005). He argues that while "refugee" is a legal category framed by twentieth-century international law and humanitarian conventions, exile carries deeper historical resonances of banishment, spiritual dislocation, and existential rupture that predate modern refugee regimes. Similarly, he differentiates exile from immigration in the sense that expatriates usually have a choice, they "voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons", and this makes them fundamentally different from the exiled, even though they "may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile" (Said, 2002, p. 181).

Said further contrasts exile and nationalism, stating that nationalism reaffirms cultural continuity and collective belonging to a place, people, and heritage, whereas exile is a "fundamentally discontinuous state of being" experienced in solitude and outside the protective

solidarities of nationhood (Said, 2002, p. 177). He does acknowledge, though, that exile is not entirely free from nationalism because once uprooted, the exiled feels "an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people" (Said, 2002, p. 177). However, as I elaborate in the following paragraphs, the distinctions that Said creates between exile and any other form of displacement or belonging give way to an exceptional state for exile that further emphasizes its intellectual and spiritual superiority.

Interestingly, Said warns against romanticizing exile's intellectual allure at the expense of its material and emotional brutality. He argues that the meaning and cultural resonance of exile have changed in the modern era, in "the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration," exile has become "a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture," in which intellectuality and aesthetic value are often foregrounded over the material harshness and violence of displacement (Said, 2002, p. 173). He acknowledges its brutal reality when he describes exile as "terrible to experience"; at the same time, he makes the risk of romanticizing it that he warns against, when he describes it as "strangely compelling to think about" (Said, 2002, p. 173). John D. Barbour (2007) sees the space of exile in Said's work as analogous to a religious myth, despite Said's critical opposition to religion. Reading through Said's memoir, *Out of Place* (2013), he argues that Said's own experiences of multiple displacements, from Jerusalem to Cairo to Lebanon and into the broader diaspora, produce a permanent sense of being out of place that becomes foundational for his intellectual identity and his critical consciousness. Barbour draws on typologies from diasporic religion to show how Said's exile resembles the supralocative (utopian) model, where attachment to any particular locale is replaced by a secular yet sacred notion of displacement (2007).

Roba Al-Salibi (2022) draws on Said's own insistence that exile's intellectual and metaphorical dimensions must never obscure its production by and through concrete acts of

political violence and loss and underscores this very point by centering the material histories and embodied realities of displacement, rather than treating exile as a universal human condition. Therefore, as foundational as Said's theory is for the study of exile, its abstract and metaphorical orientation produces significant limitations, especially when placed in conversation with the lived experiences of Egyptian women exiled activists.

Said's highly abstract definition of exile risks obscuring the harsh material realities of violence, torture, and imprisonment that so often precede and accompany exile. Said's conceptualization of exile as an intellectual or spiritual state fails to adequately address the experiences of those for whom exile is not chosen, but violently imposed as the only option for survival. In my research, Egyptian women activists describe the way the prison system, and the broader carceral logic of the state, controls their bodies and lives, regulating their access to food, water, space, air, light, hygiene, and health, and making survival conditional on compliance with the institution's needs. Neglect and violence, including torture and sexual and gender-based violence, are not incidental but central to this regime of power, reducing existence to bare survival and marking women's bodies as sites of punishment and control. For these women, exile is not a metaphorical vantage point, but a brutal necessity and the only available escape from targeted repression and erasure by the Egyptian state. This repression follows them even after their exile through transnational repression and the memory of physical, sexual, and psychological trauma and dislocation that continues to be central to their experiences in exile. I thus argue that exile must be reconceptualized to account for these violent material realities.

In Said's conceptualization, exile is not merely the physical removal from one's homeland. Is is an ongoing sense of alienation and estrangement in the intellectual, social, and political lives in exile. It does, therefore, require adopting an outsider's perspective to better understand and reflect on the margins (Alwaqaa, 2025). This is close to my own argument in

recognizing the ways the Egyptian state turns dissident citizens into fugitives and exiles through mechanisms of detention, interrogation, and forced collaboration, as I elaborate further in the fourth chapter. It does, however, depart from my analysis in holding a unique identity of in-betweenness and critical reflection for the exiled subject. In other words, while Said focuses on the exiled *intellectual*, I choose to focus on the exiled *activist*.

The reason I emphasize activist over intellectual is a visible gap between the scholarly and activist conversations about exile in Egypt. Academic work, shaped mainly by Said's framework and produced in diaspora, frequently centers the experience of being in exile, the exiled' intellectual, and the ongoing influence of Western imperialism (Nesbitt, 2004; Meriem, 2021; Salama, 2007; Zeleta, 2005; Winner, 2004). Activist narratives, on the other hand, center around post-colonial state violence pre-exile, such as carceral violence, surveillance, and repression, that create the conditions for forced displacement (HRW, 2023; EFHR, 2024; Mandour, 2022; Dunne & Hamzawy, 2019) . This tension is not simply intellectual but has concrete implications for how exiled subjects are understood, supported, and represented, both in research and in policy.

Vinay Lal (2005) notes that despite Said's broad humanistic commitments, his writings seldom addressed atrocities, particularly genocidal violence, beyond the Palestinian context. This, Lal suggests, reveals an ironic reversal in which one form of exile becomes paradigmatic for understanding all oppression, potentially narrowing the scope of the exilic critique. In other words, Said's heavy focus on the Palestinian exile, as a condition created by settler colonial power, creates a logic for exile that leaves out the central role of post-colonial state violence, as one of the primary actors forcing the experience of exile on dissenting citizens. Since Said's conceptualization is a foundational framework in the study of exile, it has resulted in a rift between academic and activist contexts, with the former leaving out the pre-exile conditions

created by the post-colonial state violence and strongly focusing on the power exercised by Western imperial power.

Another critique of Said's work concerns gender. Said's conceptualization of exile does not engage with how gender structures the exilic experience. My research and the testimonies of Egyptian women activists make clear that the Egyptian state deploys sexual and gender-based violence as an intentional, systemic tool of punishment and degradation. Gendered violence is not a secondary or incidental aspect of the production of exile; it is fundamental, shaping who is targeted, how repression unfolds, and what forms survival and resistance can take. In focusing so heavily on the figure of the exiled intellectual, whose position is constructed as one of critical reflection and ethical distance, Said's account overlooks the specific ways in which women's bodies and agency are contested, violated, and disciplined in the creation of exiled subjects.

To move beyond these limitations, I argue for a reframing of exile that treats it as a material, historical process, one that is always embodied and affective, and that cannot be adequately captured by metaphor alone. To achieve this task, I use the frameworks of biopolitics and necropolitics, as I elaborate in the theoretical section below.

1.2 Theoretical Framework: The Biopolitics and Necropolitics of Exile

To reconceptualize exile as an embodied, material reality, fundamentally shaped by the violence and surveillance practices of postcolonial authoritarian states, I integrate Said's insights with Michel Foucault's biopolitics, Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, and Giorgio Agamben's bare life. I then situate these frameworks within the context of Egypt's carceral regime as experienced by women political prisoners and exiles. Through this lens, Egyptian

women activists' exile emerges clearly as a forced condition that is created and sustained through systematic state violence rather than intellectual or metaphorical displacement.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1978) and *Society Must be Defended* (2003), Foucault introduces three different modes of power. Sovereign power, as the most traditional form of power, is exercised through violence and punishment, where the sovereign has the right "to take life or let live" (Foucault, 2003, p. 239). He then points to a shift during the 19th century, when power was not simply practiced through repression and coercion anymore, but through the institutions that "make live and [..] let die", using knowledge and technology to regulate biological processes, such as nutrition, reproduction, health, and medicine (Foucault, 2003, p. 239). Foucault's theory of biopolitics, in this way, serves as the foundation for understanding how modern states regulate social norms and behaviors and control populations.

Disciplinary power, in Foucault's theory, operates through institutions like prisons, schools, and hospitals that use surveillance as a way to make individuals conform to societal expectations. He uses the example of the Paopticon, a prison designed to keep inmates under constant surveillance, to illustrate how the disciplinary power produces "docile bodies," individuals whose behaviors are shaped through continuous observation and normalization.

While biopolitics explains the management and optimization of life, it is insufficient for capturing the deliberate exposure to death, disease, and abjection that characterizes the carceral experience of many Egyptian women activists. Achille Mbembe (2003), building on Foucault's work, conceptualizes necropolitics to highlight the state's role not merely in regulating life, but in explicitly managing death and exposure to harm. Mbembe argues that postcolonial (and colonial) settings are governed by logics that exceed or differ from Western biopolitics. In such contexts, sovereign power, the right to kill or let live, remains central and is often exercised in ways that are more direct, spectacular, and arbitrary. In these contexts, therefore, the state defines who may live and who must be excluded, abandoned, or killed.

In the Egyptian prison system, similarly, sovereign power is not only exercised through direct violence but through deliberate neglect: denial of medical care, exposure of women to overcrowding, filth, and communicable diseases, and the imposition of living conditions that systematically undermine the very possibility of health or survival. Prisons become "death-worlds", zones of indistinction where the distinction between life and death, health and illness, survival and extinction is deliberately blurred (Mbembe, 2003). The arbitrary use of travel bans, airport surveillance, refusal of passport renewals, and forced routes through dangerous borderlands further exemplify the necropolitical practices employed by the Egyptian state. As my analytical chapters reveal, in the Egyptian context, biopolitical and necropolitical strategies do not merely discipline; they also exclude, neglect, and make certain lives unlivable, particularly when intersecting with gendered and class-based hierarchies.

Giorgio Agamben deepens the critique of modern sovereignty with his concept of bare life (*la nuda vita*) in *Homo Sacer* (1998). For Agamben, the camp (exemplified by the concentration camp but extended to other spaces of exception) is the modern "nomos" or organizing principle, where the juridical order is suspended and individuals are reduced to "bare life", biological existence stripped of legal, political, or ethical value. Agamben argues that in the "state of exception," the law is paradoxically enforced by being suspended; individuals inside the camp (or prison) are included only by being excluded from the protection of rights. They exist in a state of inclusive exclusion, where their lives are exposed to death without the dignity of sacrifice or mourning.

These theoretical frameworks, I believe, are better suited to capture the full materiality of exile in contexts marked by authoritarian state violence and gendered repression. Whereas Said's framework foregrounds the intellectual and cosmopolitan dimensions of exile, my research shows that, for Egyptian women activists, exile is fundamentally an experience of

bodily vulnerability, legal exclusion, and forced survival, shaped less by imperial legacies than by the direct violence of post-colonial state power.

In the Egyptian context, this is visible in the ways the carceral system punishes and disciplines women political prisoners and subjects them to extreme acts of torture and sexual and gender-based violence, making exile a survival necessity, as I demonstrate in chapter two. The Egyptian women's prison is also a paradigmatic site of bare life. As I demonstrate in chapter three, the carceral system controls women's bodies and reduces them to their basic biological functions by strictly controlling food, water, air, light, hygiene, and health, subjecting them to regimes of neglect and exposure to harm, and transforming their bodies into the sites of state power and creating conditions that foster death. Medical neglect, the reduction of inmates to "cases," and the suspension of legal rights all point to the camp-like quality of the carceral state. Here, the sovereign decision is not to kill directly, but to let die through the withdrawal of care and protection, reducing women to biological existence in a space where suffering is normalized and unaccounted for. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in chapter four, practices such as arbitrary travel bans, airport surveillance, and the denial of passports, justified by security agencies under the state of exception, effectively strip women activists of their rights as citizens, rendering them "socially dead", forces them into necropolitical and illegal escape routes, transforming exile from a metaphorical trope into a literal necessity for survival.

Through the frameworks of biopolitics and necropolitics, exile is thus reconceptualized as a material and embodied condition of violence and exclusion, where the state exercises its disciplinary, sovereign, and necropolitical power to exclude people from citizenship and to decide who belongs and who doesn't. In this way, this chapter integrates Said's insights with the lived realities of Egyptian women exiles, aiming to reframe exile not as a metaphorical space of critical consciousness but as a materially lived, historical process.

In the following two chapters, I turn to the testimonies of Egyptian women activists and their experiences of pre-exile carceral violence and technologies of discipline of women's bodies inside the carceral system in Egypt. The fourth and last analytical chapter engages with women's testimonies of state violence in borderlands of transit, particularly in airports, border areas, and embassies.

In the next chapter, I examine Egyptian women activists' testimonies of torture and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). By focusing on the material realities of violence inside the carceral system, I aim to shed light on the power structures at home that create exiled subjects. This shift, I hope, will bridge the existing gap between academic and activist debates on exile in Egypt and advance a more materialist, historically grounded understanding of what it means to be exiled in the postcolonial world.

Chapter Two

Carceral Violence as a Material Reality of Egyptian Women Exiles

In my conceptual chapter, I engaged with Said's conceptualization of the exiled subject as "nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal" in the way that the exile lives in two simultaneous realities, wherein life in the exiled country occurs against the memory of loss, uprootedness, and dispossession from the home (p. 186, 2002). I follow this conceptualization. However, as I argued earlier, I critique Said's framing of exile as a metaphorical space of critical inquiry outside of two epistemologies and cultures, one that, I argue, privileges the exiled intellectual's experiences, which obscures the very material realities that shape the exile's experiences, both at home and in exile.

In the following three chapters, I develop a more materialist approach to exile, grounded in my interviews with Egyptian women activists in exile, utilizing Foucault's biopolitics and Mbembe's necro-politics. The Egyptian women activists I interviewed focused on the material realities of repression by the Egyptian state, both before and in exile. The following three chapters discuss these. The first two chapters engage with women's carceral experiences pre-exile by the Egyptian state. The first analytical chapter of this thesis focuses on women's experiences of torture and sexual and gender-based violence. The second analytical chapter engages with the various technologies of discipline and control over women's bodies inside carceral facilities, through the administration and control over (or lack thereof) of food, water, space, air, light, hygiene, and health. I devote two chapters to women's experiences of carceral violence pre-exile for two reasons that are important to my argument. First, the literature on exile in the MENA tends to emphasize the conditions of exile *in exile,*

which leaves state power structures at home that created the exiled subjects in the first place intact. The second is to highlight a divide between the academic and activist debates on exile in Egypt, the first of which focuses on questions of Western imperialism and power in the host country (coded Western), while the latter focuses on the power structures at home. Of course, the divide is never that clear-cut, and there is sometimes overlap. However, I argue that a divide seems to exist, which may reflect a wider gap between research and praxis that I aim to address in the following two chapters.

It is well-known and widely documented by local and international media, human rights organizations, and academic scholarship that torture is a systemic practice in the Egyptian carceral system (Abdel Aziz, 2007; Amnesty International, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2017; ICJ, 2023). However, how torture is being used against women's bodies in detention remains largely understudied. The aim of this chapter is, in part, to fill this gap and to account for women exiles' material realities of trauma and violence by the Egyptian state that form a central part of their condition of exile. The women I interviewed told me of traumatic, gut-wrenching testimonies of torture – beatings, physical punishments of all sorts, electrocutions, psychological torture, threats of murder, witnessing the torture of loved ones, verbal insults, to name some – as well as sexual and gender-based violence – rape, sexual harassmet, strip searches, threats of rapes, threats of raping their loved ones, to name some.

This chapter, therefore, has been challenging to write, not least because of the traumatic experiences involved, but also because of my personal proximity to these women, whom I have been working with both personally and professionally as an Egyptian human rights activist for seven years. At times, I wondered if any academic analysis could do justice to this kind of human suffering, which seems beyond the capacity of human consciousness or analysis. At others, a sense of responsibility prevailed as these women entrusted me with their experiences and memories of suffering. So I will do my best to do it justice.

A note on quotations is in order. This chapter will include long quotations. The reasons are as follows. First, trauma needs to be witnessed through first-person testimonies (Herman, 2015). I, as a researcher, have an ethical responsibility to my participants, who may have been telling their stories of torture and sexual and gender-based violence for the first time in their lives, to witness it without interruption. The second reason, which follows from the first, is to represent it to the world *as it is.* Testimonies of torture, sexual, and gender-based violence are extremely powerful. They do not need to be paraphrased or retold differently by researchers. To do so would render the testimonies of my participants weaker.

1.2 Torture

A journalist in her twenties was arrested and forcibly disappeared for 17 hours in a National Security Agency (NSA) headquarters (an unofficial, undisclosed detention facility), during which she was subjected to extreme forms of torture by five different NSA officers. The woman journalist shared her testimony with me:

> There were at least five officers in the room. Each of them took turns. I was threatened with being killed and dumped in the desert, and that they'd say I was a terrorist and my family would mourn me in vain…One officer called me a "slut" and a liar and kept insulting me. That's when things really escalated. Before that, I had been slapped hard across the face—his palm hit the bone of my jaw. He kept hitting me so hard that my mouth twisted from the repeated blows on one side.
>
> Another time, when he said to me, "Your mother prostituted you," I insulted him back, and that's when they pinned me down. They treated me like a rug on the floor, stomping on my back and kicking me. Another time, I was sitting in front of the officer during interrogation when someone came into the room but didn't close the door. I heard him say, "She's a slut, and the guy confessed to everything." I said, "How could he confess

to something he didn't do?" The officer shouted, "He confessed, you [expletive]" and then insulted me, grabbed me by my headscarf, slapped me hard across the face, and yelled, "Are you lying to us, you [expletive]?" He kept hurling insults and hitting me. Then he sat me in a chair, with my hands cuffed behind my back. He put something hot on the handcuffs—it sent shocks through my whole body. I think it was electrical wires. He repeated this about five times. I'd pass out, and they'd throw water on my face to wake me up and start again. The last time I completely blacked out, I heard someone say, "Enough, she's going to die." I woke up to find an officer with his hand on the zipper of my trousers.

And I had my period at the time. I was bleeding heavily, soaked, and I needed to use the bathroom. That was before the electrocution. I said, "I need to use the bathroom," and he laughed and said, "Why do you need the bathroom?" I felt like he could see the blood. I told him, "I have my period and need to clean up or change." He said, "Yeah, I noticed," and laughed. Then he said, "There are no bathrooms."

A woman activist recounted to me how she was tortured, accompanied by her baby, and made to witness the torture of her husband, in an NSA headquarters:

I realized we were in [name of NSA headquarters anonymized] when I was being taken out. My husband was with me at first. I heard his voice… but once we were inside, we were separated. I didn't hear his voice again—except during the torture. Thankfully, the only torture I personally experienced was psychological. I was carrying my infant daughter—she was in a baby holder. I was blindfolded, taken from downstairs, and made to climb about five floors on foot. Someone was pulling me up this huge staircase, and I had to bend, go up, down—all while blindfolded. Then the torture began. I could hear it. From 8 p.m. until the afternoon of the next day, I didn't sleep a single moment. I was interrogated six or seven times during those hours. I was threatened repeatedly,

and they brought in people to be tortured in front of me, including my husband. I recognized his voice and could hear the questions being asked. I had nothing to lay my daughter on. She was sick during those days. I asked for something, and they brought me one of those thin army blankets and said, "You and your daughter can sleep on this." I asked for something to cover her with, and the man just laughed and walked away.

The same journalist was arrested earlier and imprisoned. She spoke about the harsh treatment she and her infant daughter endured in prison:

I spent ten days lying on the floor with my daughter, right next to the door. By the time I was released on the tenth day, she was completely drained. She vomited every single day. We were sleeping directly on the floor next to the door, and all the cold air coming through the door would hit us first. She got very sick because of me. That was a dark period in my life—we were just sitting there doing nothing, while my husband and brother were forcibly disappeared. During those ten days, I was taken for multiple rounds of further interrogation. I was summoned four times in ten days. Because of that experience, Alia still has a phobia of loud banging sounds. If she hears a knock on the door, her face changes, and she bursts into tears. On the 'night of torture,' it wasn't just the interrogation. They would take me from Qanater to Abu Zaabal, and from Abu Zaabal to the prosecution office. Once, in the prisoner transport van, it was so dark and cramped that when my daughter peed herself, I had to change her diaper on the floor of the van in total darkness. I was crying as I changed her. When I got out of the van, I realized I was completely soaked. On another occasion, we were on our way to Abu Zaabal in the same type of transport van. The officer had lost the key to the metal lock and spent half an hour trying to break it from the inside. After thirty minutes of constant pounding, the baby was suffocating. Her eyes were wide open, staring upward, and I

kept trying to smile at her and tell her, “Don’t be scared.” But her spirit was fading. She stopped moving. She froze in fear.

An activist I spoke to, who was a minor at the time of her arrest, recounted the torture she endured at a Police Station:

> They kept asking me, “Why do you hate Officer [name]?” I told them, “Because he raped a girl from Al-Azhar University and killed one of our friends in a previous protest.” He came close to my ear and said, “Well, have you ever tried it or seen him while he was raping?” They had already removed my headscarf. I was terrified and went completely silent. There were constant threats of rape, of arresting my father and brother. I just kept quiet and said I didn’t know anything. The moment I heard the electric device next to me, I froze.
>
> They electrocuted me, brutal shocks to my chest, stomach, elbows, legs, and genitals. They shocked me over and over again, stopping and starting repeatedly for a very long time. After the first round of electrocution, I started talking. They realized the more they electrocuted me, the more I would talk. So they escalated it. I still have marks on my stomach to this day, small dots from where the electric prongs burned me.
>
> They wanted to know the whereabouts of someone, and I gave an answer. Then they asked about others I didn’t know. When I couldn’t answer, they kept electrocuting me. When I left the room, I couldn’t see. I collapsed. To revive me, one of them took a nail clipper, pulled out the file from it, and began scraping the skin off my pinky toe.

One woman activist recounted how she was made to witness other detainees being psychologically and physically tortured during the period she was subjected to precautionary measures in a police station in 2018:

> I saw them, for example, holding someone down and beating him relentlessly. Then they dragged him into the Chief Investigator’s office. The boy was screaming. He was

being beaten so badly that the entire corridor could hear his cries and the sound of the blows. And then… he went silent. He literally went quiet. We never heard his voice again. And all of us were standing there. There were ordinary civilians in the corridor, regular people, and we were all hearing these things as if they were completely normal. And it didn't just happen once; it happened multiple times. Some detainees were brought in beaten, bruised, injured, and with swollen faces. Their hands were cuffed behind their backs, and they were forced to sit in a squatting position. If you were a man brought in as a detainee, you weren't allowed to stand.

Every time I saw these people, regular citizens, not political detainees, they were always handcuffed behind their backs, forced to squat on the ground, sometimes for hours. They weren't allowed to stand. Sometimes they had to sit facing the wall. They weren't allowed to speak at all. A boy could be bleeding from the face, close to passing out, or begging to use the bathroom because he was in pain from standing or sitting so long, but if he spoke, they would beat him even more. And this happened right in front of us, and they had no issue with it. To the officers in the Investigations Unit, people were nothing. We were like air to them.

Some people were even handcuffed to metal pipes in the room, or tied with one hand to a desk or chair leg, things like that. Sometimes they would say to me, "Wait here, I'll be right back," and I'd be left standing in front of someone bleeding from every part of his face. These were incredibly cruel scenes. You find yourself unable to comprehend that you're witnessing this with your own eyes.

2.2 Sexual and Gender-based Violence

Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) was consistently reported by the women I spoke to. A journalist shared a rape testimony by an airport officer while she was detained while trying to leave the country:

> While I was at the airport, the officer in charge of the detention, not a State Security officer, just the one responsible for the holding cell, brought me out from where we were being held, closed the door, and kept telling me, "Don't cry, don't cry." He brought a doctor because I was nearly dying, I hadn't eaten in a long time, and had been crying constantly. Then my blood sugar had dropped, so he brought me food and drink, but I didn't take any of it. I was in a state of shock because it happened right after I got the 15-day detention order and was returned to the airport. I felt like everything had collapsed, like the world had ended. He sexually harassed me and raped me.

An activist who was 20 years old shared this horrific testimony of sexual violence:

> They electrocuted me—severe electrocution—on my chest, stomach, elbow, legs, and genitals. I was electrocuted for a very long time. They kept interrogating me until they brought my brother, Youssef. They removed his blindfold and stripped me of my abaya in front of him so that he would think something had been done to me in his presence, even though nothing had happened yet. They did it to threaten him so he'd give them the information they wanted. They then released him. I heard the officer say to me, "Get down on your knees, and do what you did last time." Then he put his hand on my chest and asked, "Are you sure Islam Moqbel didn't do anything to you before?' At that moment, I didn't know how to respond. I couldn't do anything. I was just trembling from fear. My heart was racing, and my body had gone cold. When he told me to do what I did the last time—to go up and down—I started to move, and he pushed me down to the floor, held me there, and I felt something against my mouth. That bastard

had taken his genitals out. I started screaming while he kept hitting me until I collapsed. It only stopped when another officer told him, “That’s enough, sir. Let her go.”

A journalist in her twenties also shared this testimony:

> During my 17-hour disappearance, they kept electrocuting me. I couldn’t take it, and I passed out. When I came to, I found someone, probably an officer, though I’m not sure, his hand was on me, and he was trying to unzip my trousers. I woke up to that, and of course, I panicked. I started screaming and crying, begging them: “Take whatever information you want, just don’t touch me.” After that, someone came and sat with me and asked, “What happened?” I told him what had happened, and he said, “Okay, no one will harm you again, but this must never be spoken of.” There was constant verbal abuse, of course, and threats to perform a virginity test, threats of rape, threats that they would strip me naked and stretch me out. It went on like that the whole time. From the very first moment I entered their office, one of them said to me, “Listen, girl, if you don’t tell me everything I want to know, if you don’t confess to everything, I swear to God I’ll strip you naked, hang you up, and stretch you out.” That was the very first thing he said before anything else. And all the time, they kept throwing accusations at me, saying I wasn’t a virgin. He said to me, “I’m going to examine you myself.” In the middle of all this, they took me into an office where there was another officer, and suddenly he started talking to me, saying: “Look, girl, we’ve got leaked recordings and sexual photos of you.” I didn’t understand where they could’ve come from. I never took any photos like that. There’s nothing they could be holding against me. But he said, “We’re going to send them to your family—your father… One time, one of them said to me, “Don’t you all say we rape you in here? Well, we’ll rape you for real. Don’t you claim you left here pregnant? We’ll make sure you leave here pregnant for real.” That was their method. An officer would say, “I’ll bring the lowest-ranking soldier I have

and make him do it to you," describing it in explicit, obscene terms, naming parts of my body. He said things like, "Your sisters go through this every hour, so it's only natural for any man's blood to boil." And when I tried to object, saying, "Don't talk about my family like that. You don't know who they are," I was threatened that they would arrest my mother and father, and that they would bring my sisters and rape them in front of me.

The same journalist shared this testimony of sexual harassment by a police officer:

> He was a first lieutenant. He came into the room, pretending to be on the phone, or maybe he actually was, I don't know. I saw him standing behind the glass, visible from the waist down. While speaking on the phone, his hand moved to his trousers and he began to masturbate. When I saw what was happening, I couldn't do anything. I just lowered my head to the floor and started crying. But the more I cried, the louder his moaning got. I felt like he was enjoying it. He finished—he ejaculated—then left. Afterwards, once I had calmed down, I asked to see the head of investigations at the station. I went in, told him what had happened, and said I wanted to take legal action and file a report. He said, "Fine, we'll write it up," but then added, "We'll also file a public morality report against you." It was unbearable. I was completely devastated. I was terrified of being imprisoned again, and at the same time, I had no idea how to claim my rights.

Strip searches are routinely used in women's prisons and police stations. One woman shared her testimony:

> The prison intake—everything from the initial entry to the inspection—was extremely degrading. It was literally harassment, a blatant and unnatural violation. When we entered, they took charge of us, took all our belongings, and gave us the shal, the white prison uniform. But before we could change, we were completely naked. A woman

came and searched every part of our bodies, literally. She made me take off my hair tie and earrings, and she searched underneath, in an extremely invasive and humiliating manner.

Another woman confirmed:

A guard named Amal Atiya conducted my search. I was made to change out of my civilian clothes into the filthy "shal." It was transparent, unwashed, and clung to the body. If you didn't have white undergarments from home, you weren't allowed to wear anything underneath. The cloth was stiff and resembled curtain fabric. There was also a procedure called the "vaginal search," where the inmate had to either allow a gloved hand to search internally or squat repeatedly as the guard watched. I experienced the latter. Most others weren't so lucky. They were searched manually.

Another shared how deeply degrading and humiliating strip searches are conducted:

I was told to remove all colored clothing before entering. I said that would leave me in just a bra and underwear, so I changed into white garments. During the body search, I was taken into a bathroom and told to remove everything. The guard touched me between my legs and asked if I was a virgin. When I said yes, she replied, "So I can't insert my finger?" as though that was a routine part of the search. She ran her hands over my body in a sexual way, clearly not for safety but humiliation. When I reported her to the head of investigations, he just yelled at her. That was it.

Once inside, male officers rummaged through our bags and threw items on the floor, including sanitary pads and medications, and made us pick them up. It was deeply degrading. The guards groped and harassed us, and what they did to criminal inmates was even worse. One female guard told me, "You have such a nice body and walk," and asked me to stay and chat after searching me. There were two guards, Hanem and

> Hanaa, who were known for sexually harassing inmates. They would insist on touching our breasts and pelvic areas, even inserting fingers into some inmates.

In her book, *Memory of Repression* (2014), Basma Abdel Aziz conducted an extensive study of torture in Egyptian prisons, police stations, State Security headquarters, and other places of detention, in which she describes torture as a systematic practice. While the book was published pre-military coup era, the methods of torture she documents were consistent with those reported by the women I spoke to: beating, suspension, sexual abuse, rape, deprivation, humiliation, electrical shocks, unsanitary conditions, threats of harming the victims family, witnessing torture of other victims, dragging on the floor, forcing body parts into hot or cold water, breaking bones, and burning. This confirms Abdel Aziz's main argument that torture has become deeply embedded within the political and institutional system of the Egyptian state, and is used not only to extract confessions but to deliberately subjugate individuals and break their will, and spread fear in society. Abdel Aziz analyzes the relationship between the torturer and the political regime, arguing that the executioner becomes an extension of state authority, not a mere sadistic individual.

Through a comparative study, Daruis Rejali (2009) argues that authoritarian regimes like Egypt institutionalize torture not only as a method of interrogation but as a symbolic practice aimed at reinforcing obedience and social control. All these authors agree that Egypt exemplifies how torture is routinized and bureaucratized within the state's repressive machinery.

While these studies were conducted before 2013, there has been an explosion of political incarceration in post-2013 Egypt as a core pillar of state repression (Mandour & Lakhal, 2024). The sharp rise in political detentions, the systemic use of solitary confinement, denial of healthcare, overcrowding, and the normalization of torture is linked to broader

mechanisms of authoritarian control. Detention, therefore, is a tool not only for punishment but also for political silencing and social marginalization (Mandour & Lakhal, 2024).

The repression and torture of activists in post-2013 Egypt come within a larger proclaimed state of exception. As Ardovini and Mabon (2019) note, the Egyptian state has institutionalized the "state of exception" as a permanent mode of governance. The suspension of legal norms, they argue, has been systematically integrated into the structures of state power. Rather than being reactive responses to crises, emergency measures in Egypt have become routinized instruments of governance.

Within such a state of exception, the carceral regime operates as a mechanism of control, surveillance, degradation, and fear dissemination. In his book, *Who Owns the Right to the Body?* (2023), Ahmed Abdel Halim offers a critical examination of carceral violence and bodily autonomy within the context of Egypt's carceral system, drawing on his personal experience as a former political prisoner as well as interviews with former detainees. Abdel Halim argues that the prison system in Egypt functions not merely as a site of punishment but as a mechanism for the systematic degradation and dehumanization of individuals. He describes *the Humiliated Body* as a product of carceral architecture, both physical and epistemic, that renders detainees visible, penetrable, and controllable. Drawing on Foucauldian notions of biopower and Agamben's bare life, he illustrates how the state, through routine practices of torture and sexual violence, reconfigures the body into a symbol of submission and a vessel of imposed obedience.

3.2 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the harsh realities of carceral violence as a key element in the experiences of exile among Egyptian women activists. Although painful and deeply distressing,

the accounts gathered in this chapter are more than just personal narratives; they serve as evidence of a wider carceral system influenced by gender and race.

Importantly, this chapter has challenged mainstream ideas of exile by grounding it in the tangible and lived experiences of violence that occur before physical displacement, instead of viewing exile as merely an abstract state of being or a metaphor for intellectual marginalization, as Edward Said's perspective (2002)often suggests, this analysis reconnects the concept to the prison cells, interrogation chambers, and secret detention sites where the condition of exile is literally created. For the women interviewed, exile is not merely a result of crossed borders, but is violently initiated by the state's sovereign power over their bodies, families, and reproductive rights.

The distinct gender aspects of these testimonies call for a thorough feminist re-examination of state violence. In these accounts, torture serves not just as a tool for getting confessions or silencing opposition, but as a deliberate demonstration of power. Practices such as strip searches, threats of rape, forced nudity, and sexual assaults function as mechanisms of state terror that reinforce patriarchal power structures while also signaling the extent of sovereign violence into the most private and bodily domains. These actions are not peripheral to the carceral system; they are central to it. Torture and sexualized violence against women, therefore, are integral to authoritarian rule. By highlighting personal testimonies that exemplify "bare life," I have emphasized that the study of exile should stem from suffering and endurance, not merely theoretical frameworks.

This chapter, therefore, establishes a foundation for a materially informed feminist theorization of exile. It emphasizes that before we can analyze the conditions of exile in terms of displacement, we must first address the violence that creates exile. The following chapter builds upon this foundation by investigating the everyday regulatory mechanisms and deprivations that occur within carceral environments, further exploring how the state

manipulates the most fundamental aspects of life, such as food, water, hygiene, and personal space, against female detainees. In doing so, I continue to construct an analytical framework that highlights the necropolitical and biopolitical underpinnings of oppression, as expressed and theorized by women who have lived through these experiences.

Chapter Three

Technologies of Discipline and Control over Women's Bodies in the Carceral System of Egypt: the Production of Abjection and Death

Women activists told me of various "technologies of power" (Foucault, 2003) used by the prison system to discipline and control women's bodies in their mundane day to day lives in prison, from the amount and distribution of food, water, space, and sunlight they are allowed, to mechanisms of "letting die" and "making sick" (Mbembe, 2003) by controlling their access to basic life-saving medications and essential healthcare and sanitation.

In examining the material realities of Egyptian women activists' pre-exile experiences, this chapter focuses on their experiences of imprisonment, drawing on theoretical frameworks from Michel Foucault's biopolitics and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics. Drawing on detailed testimonies from former women political prisoners, it demonstrates how the carceral system operates not only as a disciplinary structure but also as a sovereign space that exerts power over life and death, where women's bodies become the direct targets of state and carceral technologies. The subsections below examine the multifaceted techniques of control that constitute the biopolitical and necropolitical management of women's lives in prison. Using a biopolitical and necropolitical framework to understand the material realities of imprisonment, torture, sexual and gendered violence, and technologies of control within the prison system, is, I argue, better suited to capture and make sense of the material realities that led to Egyptian women activists' exile than Said's romanticization of exile as a metaphorical space of critical inquiry.

3.1 Food and Water: Managing Hunger and Thirst as Bio/Necropolitical Control

Former women political prisoners I interviewed consistently complained that the food provided by the prison was insufficient in quantity, deficient in quality, and often inedible. The way the food was distributed was telling of an underlying carceral policy of regulation, management, and the prison population. There are no individual meals. Instead, the prison would distribute chunks of essential food to an entire prison cell every morning for the day. "There are no fixed or standardized meals in prison. The prison administration only provides some essential food items like tomatoes, eggs, milk, and onions", one woman told me.

Women prisoners described surviving on meager rations, such as a box of cheese and a loaf of bread, or uncooked vegetables like zucchini and onions: "The prison would give us bread in the morning, just enough for the room. They would also give us a carton of cheese, a strange kind, and vegetables like eggplant or zucchini. The amount was much less than what was needed for the room". Another woman prisoner describes the dire food situation and the small portions:

> The prison had food, but we didn't take it because it was rotten. The only exception was the bread; they would bring us three loaves of bread a day, which we would take. Sometimes, we also received vegetables… However, the portions were very small; sometimes they would bring two eggs for every two people.

Because of the inhumanity and inadequacy of the quality, quantity, and distribution of prison food, women political prisoners often relied on food provided by their families through visits. As one woman explained, "We used to rely on food from visits. We had a system where we would divide it among ourselves; whoever visited would bring food". However, even with food coming through visits, prison guards exercise rigid and often humiliating forms of carceral

control and surveillance over the incoming food, searching the food with their bare hands, exercising rigidity and control over the types of food that are allowed to enter, and stealing food from visits.

This created a class system in prison between political and criminal detainees, and more broadly between those who were able to rely on external familial support and those who were not. As a woman prisoner's mother explained to me, "The criminal detainees and those without money were the ones who would take it [the prison's food]".

Testimonies also revealed widespread contamination of drinking and bathing water in prisons. One woman prisoner's testimony is particularly telling:

> We used to rely on drinking bottled mineral water from the canteen. However, during August, there was a severe shortage of mineral water, and we became very thirsty. We had to drink the prison's tap water, but we would boil it and leave it to cool. During the visits, when the water crisis began, I asked my family to bring water with them. We were very frugal with water usage until the visits arrived. The prison water had large worms in it, resembling snakes, coming out of the taps. They probably opened the taps directly to the Nile without any filtration or purification systems. Later, I only bathed using that water and washed my hair with bottled mineral water.

Another woman shared, "The water was very bad. Sometimes, when we opened the tap, we would find black water with a rotten smell, and small fish would come out of it."

> The water used for drinking and bathing in women's prisons is the same. The women interviewed shared testimonies of bathing water causing them skin problems and diseases: The prison water was extremely bad. Our hair started falling out severely, and the color of our skin changed. It darkened quickly, and we developed dark spots on our skin. We used to buy water from outside the canteen or the cafeteria, and the water would cause hair loss, darken the skin, and leave dark spots.

Here, we notice the same class system created by the carceral management and failures of the prison.

These policies reflect biopolitical control over the inmates' bodies by regulating caloric intake and nutritional neglect. According to Foucault (Foucault, 2003), biopolitics involves the administration of life at its most basic level, such as food, thirst, health, and reproduction. In Egyptian prisons, food provisioning, or the lack thereof, becomes a primary instrument of biopolitical control. Similarly, inadequate access to clean water constitutes a denial of the basic biological conditions for life, creating a form of institutional abandonment aligned with Agamben's (1998) concept of bare life.

This hunger and thirst regime functions biopolitically; it classifies and sorts prisoners according to their economic support from outside and their political status. Those with families were able to supplement their diets, while others were forced to endure chronic hunger. Food becomes a currency of discipline: edible meals are contingent upon external support, reinforcing social hierarchies and punishing those without external familial or financial support.

It also functions necropolitically. According to Mbembe (2003), when sovereignty is expressed through the power to expose populations to premature death, where the state exerts power by deciding which lives can be neglected without consequence, it crosses into the realm of necropolitics. The Egyptian Carceral system is not using biopolitics to optimize health and longevity, as Foucault argues. Rather, it exposes women prisoners' bodies to disease and contamination.

3.2 Prison Space: Compression as Control

Women political prisoners' testimonies recall apocalyptic scenes of overcrowded bodies stacked next to each other, with little to no space to move, eat, or sleep; prison cells designed

for 10 detainees held 40 or more prisoners. In the ward for incoming detainees, 60 women were packed into a room meant for a fraction of that. Beds were shared, rotated, or unavailable altogether. Movement, prayer, going to the bathroom, and even eating required coordination and rotation due to the limited space.

I quote one woman detainee's testimony at length here as it describes in detail the overcrowding they suffered in prison:

> The overcrowding was extreme. People slept on the floor, between beds, and even in the hallway leading to the bathroom. There was no space between the beds. Every inch of the floor was used for sleeping. Only the room monitor had a bed to herself. The political detainees' ward was attached to a criminal detainee's ward. The political section had two rooms, and the criminal side had one. I stayed in a political detainees' ward with five-bed units, each containing three-tiered bunk beds. Each 90-centimeter-wide bed housed two inmates. It was physically and mentally taxing. I later heard the number of occupants increased, and three people had to share each bed. In the intake ward, I personally experienced this: three people per bed. The room, which could barely accommodate ten standing individuals, housed around 60 detainees, excluding two monitors. There were five bed units, each with three beds. Except for the monitor, each bed held two inmates. Conditions in the criminal detainees' wards were worse. Criminal detainees often slept on the floor. If they wanted a bed to themselves, they had to pay in cigarettes. Otherwise, they had to share a bed or sleep on the floor or in between beds. At night, the hallway to the bathroom was often blocked by sleeping bodies, making it hard to move through.

In such an environment of overcrowding bodies, women had to negotiate how to occupy this limited space with their bodies using as little space as possible to perform their essential bodily functions, eating, sleeping, bathing, going to the bathroom, a condition that not only reduces

the body to its basic biological functions but also limits its ability to perform those essential functions. One woman detainee told me:

> We could only sleep on our sides and were unable to turn over. The beds were three-tiered with thin foam mattresses; we used blankets for extra cushioning. There were no sheets—just a mattress and a pillow. At one point, political prisoners were confined to a single ward, which led to rotating sleep schedules. Some slept while others stayed awake. Others slept on the floor… While going to the bathroom, we often stepped over many people sleeping in the hallway. At one point, the ward housed more than 50 women, all sharing a single bathroom.

The prison forces women detainees into this negotiation between available physical space and essential bodily needs.

Detainees described sleeping conditions as structurally violent. One reported, "The beds were made of metal and stacked in three tiers. There were no mattresses provided by the prison." Another echoed this: "The beds were narrow metal frames... foam mattresses were poor quality."

The prison did not provide bedding at all. Another woman in what is called "the military ward" told me, "When I arrived, the tiny room held 47 women. Three slept per bed (on nine beds), while the rest had to sleep on the floor in alternating directions to fit into the space." A woman detainee's mother says:

> We brought everything for her: sheets, covers, and blankets. The mattress was a thin foam slab, and the pillow was terrible. When she started having neck problems, I got her a medical pillow, but they wouldn't let her have it.

These extreme physical conditions were a lot worse for criminal detainees and those of the lower classes. "To have a bed to oneself costs up to 1,000 EGP per month," one woman detainee told me. Another woman paints this class-based system quite vividly:

> In the criminal detainees' ward, most women slept on the floor, in hallways, and even in bathrooms. Only those who could afford to pay had beds. As commonly said by criminal detainees, "Those with money survive here; those without do not."

Class once again mediates access to survival in prison. Those who could pay received beds, blankets, or better cell placements. Those who could not were crushed, physically and psychologically, by the weight of bodies and the absence of breathable space.

I also interviewed a political detainee who had a physical disability and suffered massively from these extreme conditions. She recalls:

> The beds were made of metal and stacked in three tiers. There were no mattresses provided by the prison. Some inmates had acquired them long ago, and others managed to buy from criminal inmates. I was given a medical mattress that had originally belonged to [a former prisoner], who was ill. She passed it to me when I got sick. Families brought in bedsheets during visits. Many inmates just slept on army-issued blankets spread over the bare metal.

These conditions create a coercive infrastructure that exhausts the body, echoing Foucault's insight that institutions control through environmental discipline. In Mbembe's terms, this spatial compression turns the prison into a death-world, not because it kills directly, but because it systematically removes the conditions necessary for a livable life. The distinction between "living space" and "dying space" collapses. Foucault's model of the panopticon presumes visibility; here, control is exerted not through sight, but through suffocation.

Prison architecture, in Foucault's work, is a central element of discipline and control. In Egypt's women's prisons, spatial deprivation is weaponized to transform even rest into a site of suffering. Testimonies consistently describe overcrowded conditions: triple-tier metal bunk beds without mattresses, paper-thin foam slabs, and insufficient bedding. Detainees of lower classes sleep on bare iron frames or army blankets spread on the floor. The denial of

basic bodily needs is embedded in the very design of prison life. In the logic of necropolitics, the body is kept alive but denied rest, comfort, and dignity.

3.3 Under-exposure to Air and Over-exposure to Light: How the Prison Controls Women's Breathing and Seeing

Women detainees' testimonies reveal chilling effects of deliberate control over the amount of air and light women's bodies are allowed in prison. One woman described the ventilation situation to me in detail:

> The room had two openings: one at the top of the iron door and another near the adjacent section where criminal inmates kept their food heaters. These heaters emitted heat and odors into our room from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. This caused breathing difficulties and fainting. Despite complaints, no action was taken. There was a single ceiling fan for 30 people. The overcrowding meant no space to stand, move, pray, or even sit and eat. We had to take turns just to pray. Cooking occurred in the same room where we slept. The primitive heaters used exposed wires and broken stones. Only two heaters served the entire room, often causing power outages and electrocutions. As a result, we mostly relied on dry food brought during visits. Our refrigerator was broken and couldn't close properly, so the food often spoiled.

"In July and August, the room became like an oven," one woman likened the situation during the hot summers inside prison cells, adding that "ten women had to be hospitalized". A mother said her daughter was overheating in prison cells in April and that the prison refused to allow a fan. "We paid bribes just to get a fan turned on," a woman detainee told me.

The prison's refusal to provide basic ventilation systems to women detainees has brought them to the brink of respiratory collapse. Heat from food heaters, combined with overcrowding and sealed windows, made many rooms into literal ovens. Several women report

hospitalizations due to suffocation and asthma. One former prisoner told me that she required oxygen therapy and kept an inhaler at all times. The prison responded frequently to such emergencies: “There is no other space.”

This condition of airlessness evokes Mbembe’s “death-worlds,” where life continues in a state of constant threat. The act of breathing becomes a contested political act, one that the state can grant or withhold. Ventilation, like food and water, is treated not as a right but as a tool of sovereign discretion.

In addition to control over “air”, a most basic biological need, the prison also subjected women detainees to perpetual, around-the-clock fluorescent lights. Women detainees’ testimonies consistently report that artificial lighting remained on 24/7, which is considered a form of psychological torture. Neon tubes above beds disrupted circadian rhythms, caused eye strain, and heightened the women’s psychological distress. Requests to turn off the lights were denied, with absurd justifications such as “remove your sheets if you want less light.”

One woman said, “Throughout my six-month imprisonment, the lights were never turned off. There were four long fluorescent lamps in the room. If one malfunctioned, it was immediately repaired.” Another woman told me of the intense physical and psychological effects of perpetual exposure to lighting:

> The lighting was extremely intense and caused eye strain. Neon lights were installed directly above the beds. Those on the top bunks experienced both heat and bright light, while those below were less affected. We were never allowed to turn off the lights. When we requested to switch them off at night, we were told to remove the sheets covering our beds instead, which was unreasonable.

Another shared, “Neon lights were installed directly above the beds... we were never allowed to turn off the lights.” A third confirmed, “The room had four neon lights that remained on 24 hours a day.”

The constant illumination serves as both a metaphor and a material condition of unrelenting surveillance and disruption. Foucault emphasizes the disciplinary function of visibility in carceral architecture, but here, perpetual lighting becomes a form of punishment. The inability to retreat into darkness or rest without exposure turns even night into a site of surveillance and suffering. The prison denies the very natural rhythms of the body and exposes it to perpetual, non-ending surveillance and unrest.

3.4 Hygiene: Filth, Insects, and the Production of Abjection

Hygiene becomes another terrain of biopolitical and necropolitical power and control. Women detainees described insect-ridden environments, unhygienic bathrooms, withholding of essential personal hygiene products from women, a myriad of menstrual-related issues, and overall uncleanliness. This seems to be part of a broader strategy of abjection, where the body is made to feel revolting and disposable.

Cockroaches, rodents, and even snakes were commonly reported. Lice outbreaks, dirty toilets, and broken cisterns created a permanent condition of uncleanliness. One woman recalls:

> The cell was infested with cockroaches. One time, due to the extreme heat, I was sitting in minimal clothing and a cockroach crawled on my body (in a very private area). I was initially distressed and unaccustomed to such conditions, but I eventually had to force myself to ignore it. Otherwise, I would have lost my mind.

Another woman told me of gut-wrenching scenes in what is called “the military ward”, where women arrested on morality charges were often detained. She says:

> The military ward was adjacent to a garbage dump, where all types of waste, including aborted fetuses from criminal detainees, were discarded. The smell from the dump would drift into the cells. The prison itself was situated on agricultural land near the Nile, which increased the likelihood of reptiles and insects entering.

The women often made complaints to the prison administration about this extreme lack of hygiene and were met with apathy or no response at all. One woman told me of their several attempts at allowing insecticides in the prison to tackle the infestations inside prison cells:

> We made several requests to the head of investigations to allow us to bring in insecticides. He refused, saying it was our responsibility to maintain cleanliness. Occasionally, they would conduct a burn-cleansing of the entire cell block using flammable sprays. However, this was ineffective, as the cockroaches would return within days. Once, a rabid cat scratched multiple inmates and refused to leave beneath my bed. The cat gave birth there and hissed at anyone who approached. Despite repeated complaints, no action was taken for three weeks.

As a result, she added, "a significant number of inmates developed skin diseases due to the overall lack of hygiene".

In addition, toilets were few and unhygienic, as one noted: "Only two were reserved for political prisoners... the Western-style toilet was missing a cistern lid, posing a serious hygiene risk."

There were limitations on bathing due to overcrowding, limited facilities, and long lines. As one woman noted to me, "Showering required prior permission, and we had to wait until everyone finished using the bathroom. Sometimes, I waited for two hours." This was not feasible for less able-bodied women. As one woman with a physical disability told me:

> The political prisoners' cell did not have a private bathroom. There was a shared bathroom for both political and criminal detainees, with only eight toilets in the entire facility. During my first three months, these shared toilets required us to queue and wait. I could not go alone, so I had to take someone from the cell and bring a chair to wait.

Women also told me that some personal hygiene items were either strictly prohibited or only allowed under strict and classist conditions, such as being sold at high prices in the prison canteen and not being allowed to enter by families during visits:

> No hygiene products were distributed; we relied entirely on family visits. Some detainees, particularly those from Sinai who received no visits, had to be supported entirely by others. Although soap and detergent were available in the canteen, their prices were often unaffordable for many.

Another woman told me of similar essential hygiene and cleaning products and services being only available at high prices or being strictly forbidden, vividly painting a class system produced and maintained by the prison through women's bodies and needs:

> Laundry was done by the inmates themselves, although a washing machine was available for 100 EGP/month, allowing two washes per week. Clothes could be ironed at the prison workshop in exchange for a pack of cigarettes per outfit. Nearly all transactions and services in the prison required payment in cigarettes. The prison administration prohibited any glass or aerosol items, including basic hygiene products. Even shampoo bottles were sometimes not allowed during visits.

This is also seen when it comes to menstrual products. The prison system weaponizes women's menstrual products, health, and needs for its own profits, all while subjecting women's bodies to menstrual pain, health issues, and disease. One woman told me:

> Sanitary pads were occasionally available in the canteen and were often brought during visits, but their prices were much higher than outside…Menstrual issues were exacerbated by the psychological stress, sometimes leading to irregular or prolonged periods. Some criminal detainees who did not receive family visits or couldn't afford pads had no choice but to go without any hygiene protection during their periods. They might receive charity from others, but many simply went without. The administration

> did not intervene. Those without money had to work inside the prison, cleaning bathrooms or cells, to earn pads. Otherwise, they endured their periods without any supplies.

These practices transformed the carceral space into a site of microbial, parasitic, and moral decay. As Agamben suggests, such spaces are designed to reduce human life to its most abject, unprotected form. This exposure to death without outright execution is the essence of *bare life*. The prison becomes a zone of indistinction, where categories like sick/healthy and guilty/innocent lose their meaning.

3.5 Bare Life: Letting Die and Making Sick in Egyptian Women's Prisons

To follow from the last subsection, women's testimonies on healthcare in prisons reveal the existence of a carceral environment that can be likened to Agamben's death-worlds, where the sovereign exercises power over which lives are disposable. This is done not only through institutional neglect but also through creating a carceral space that structurally fosters conditions of death, as will be demonstrated further in this section through women's testimonies on healthcare in prisons.

The medical facilities in prison were generally described as extremely inadequate, unhygienic, and lacking basic equipment. The hospital lacked even basic equipment, such as CT scanners or sterilization facilities. Doctors were often unqualified military personnel, and dental and psychiatric care was virtually non-existent. One woman described to me the prison hospital:

> There was only one general practitioner per day, and two upstairs doctors. The staff included only two nurses. The dental clinic was open only once a week, and it was poorly equipped. The surgery area had no sterilization measures; its doors were always open. The so-called isolation room was filthy, with no tile flooring, and lacked even

> basic hygiene. One inmate with tuberculosis was housed there on a dirty floor and eventually died after being denied adequate care.

Another woman who was detained in solitary confinement for a prolonged period of time told me of an even darker picture:

> There is no real healthcare, solitary or otherwise. In solitary confinement, doctors do rounds and ask how we are doing, but even then, care is nonexistent. There is a gynecologist, but other medical services are basic or inadequate. Even surgeries were unhygienic. I saw a woman with tuberculosis who was not appropriately isolated. She roamed without a mask. I was once hospitalized in a room with two fixed beds and filthy sheets, no pillows, and concrete floors. The isolation room had a single black leather bed on cement flooring.

Women political detainees consistently told me of a chilling testimony of how the prison would react when someone got sick: they bang on the prison cell for hours, to no avail, until a prison guard would finally come hours later and take the sick woman to the prison hospital, often after she had already suffered health complications as a result of that negligence. The women frequently described the horror, despair, and helplessness accompanying incidents of sickness in prisons. One woman told me of a fire incident that went unaddressed for hours:

> If someone got sick, they could be taken to the prison hospital, but only after persistently calling for the guards, sometimes for hours. This was especially common in the Criminal Ward, where many detainees suffered from epilepsy. On one occasion, a girl dropped a lit cigarette, causing a small fire. They screamed for help, but there were no fire extinguishers. If a major incident occurred, no one would come in time.

On treating emergency cases of women with epilepsy, another woman told me:

> When we called for a guard during a medical emergency, they took at least 30 minutes to respond. The medical “treatment” was always the same ointment. The clinic had no

> specialists. The doctors were officers who had no medical training…. When a woman with epilepsy screamed at night, the guard tied her hands and feet until the episode ended. That was it. Another girl…had seizures and was left on the floor.

Another woman told me of a detainee who had an unchecked broken bone and another who vomited blood regularly with no adequate medical care:

> When another inmate broke her bone at dawn, it took two hours of banging on the doors before a guard came, and even then, she waited until Sunday to be treated. Another inmate vomited blood regularly but received no diagnosis, just meds to stop the bleeding. We often told each other, "If you get sick in here, you'll die."

This intentional medical negligence did lead to the death of women in some cases. One former detainee I interviewed describes watching another detainee die after a night-shift doctor, reportedly using drugs, stole her medication: "I witnessed women die due to untreated illnesses. One had a severe chest infection, and the night-shift doctor, who was reportedly using drugs, stole her medication. She died, and no one visited her". This story is not exceptional; it is paradigmatic. In these prisons, the life of a detainee is reduced to a biological minimum, kept alive just enough not to create scandal, but denied the conditions necessary for health or survival.

Some of the women I interviewed had medical conditions prior to their detention, or developed them during their detention as a result of structurally violent conditions. One woman who had lupus was kept in what is called "the sick ward," which she describes as a "catastrophe". Even though her condition was not contagious, she was kept in a ward with detainees who had contagious diseases and where there was no separation between people with infectious and non-infectious diseases. The human rights conditions in the "sick ward" were so extreme that "during prison inspections, they would cover the ward entrance and threaten us to stay silent", the woman told me.

Another woman I interviewed had a bullet lodged in my leg for over a year before her arrest by security personnel during a protest. I quote her here at length as her testimony reveals the persistent failure of the prison system to tend to women's health, but it also demonstrates how the carceral structure and bureaucracy cause them further health complications:

> [The prison hospital] director at the time was a military doctor [name anonymized] known for prescribing birth control pills for nearly every complaint, even headaches. He was reportedly arrogant and dismissive. Despite multiple formal complaints filed by my family regarding my leg injury (I had a bullet lodged in my leg for over a year before my arrest), I was not referred for proper medical care. Initially, approval from State Security was required to access the prison hospital. Even then, the hospital lacked basic diagnostics. I needed a CT scan, but they only had a basic X-ray, which they later removed altogether. Although the doctor claimed they had physical therapy equipment, it was either insufficient or misused. One time, a military doctor named Mohamed Khater gave me a treatment that caused burns on my leg. I filed a report, but they later claimed I had refused treatment. My family's request for outside care was denied until much later, when I was finally transferred to Qasr El-Aini Hospital. There was a visiting ophthalmologist once a week, but no emergency doctors or specialists for neurological conditions. Most physicians were generalists... Dental care was nearly nonexistent.

The fact that the doctor was a military personnel member with inadequate medical training was similarly echoed by other women I interviewed. Women told me that prison doctors often prescribed pain killers for women complaining of any health issue, speaking of a prison healthcare mentality that focuses on numbing the pain rather than treating underlying health issues, even for those who were suffering from severe and chronic health issues.

The fact that women needed permission from the State Security Agency to be transferred to a civilian hospital and received adequate medical care was also echoed by other

women I spoke to. One woman's testimony is particularly illuminating as it showcases how carceral conditions exacerbate women's health conditions:

> The head of investigations told me I needed approval from the public prosecutor to be transferred to a hospital. Even when I provided that, he claimed he needed a green light from State Security. I entered prison as a post-surgical patient recovering from a slipped disc operation, walking just fine. But prison conditions, especially transport vehicles, exacerbated my injury. One return trip left me unable to sleep for three days due to the pain. Despite needing nerve inflammation injections, I was only given generic painkillers, which made me nauseous. Even when my family provided proper medication, the nurses were untrained and often caused severe pain during injections.

This experience further underscores the arbitrariness of access to care: even with a public prosecutor's order, she was told she needed further approval from State Security. This reveals how legal rights are suspended under carceral sovereignty, the law becomes a facade that masks and fosters the normalization of suffering and illness.

Women consistently told me of the complete lack of psychiatric care in prisons: "There were no dedicated psychiatric services". Another woman told me: "A psychiatrist was supposedly available, but I never saw one. One woman who had previously been in psychiatric treatment was continuously told, 'The doctor didn't come this week.'"

A detainee's mother recounts how her daughter, following enforced disappearance, had attempted suicide, and "suffered from severe psychological distress, resulting in spontaneous bruising and nerve issues that made it impossible for her to stand for more than ten minutes". Despite this, prison authorities banned her painkillers from coming in. This is governance through neglect-as-discipline.

Foucault's notion of the "medical gaze" is turned on its head: rather than diagnosing and caring, the medical apparatus surveils and disciplines through neglect. Mbembe's

necropolitics articulates the way in which the state controls who may live and who may die. In this context, the denial of care, the misprescription of drugs, and the relegation of emergency cases to endless waiting signal a systemic abandonment. Prisoners are left to suffer or die slowly. In Giorgio Agamben's theory, *bare life* (or *la nuda vita*) refers to life stripped of political significance, life that is exposed to death but not afforded the dignity of being mourned, counted, or protected. In the Egyptian women's prison system, *bare life* becomes the default condition under which detainees are forced to exist.

The testimonies presented reveal a systematic degradation of the health infrastructure and an indifference to human suffering that transforms care into abandonment. The way the women recount how it could take hours of desperate pleading before a sick inmate would be seen by medical staff. These are not failures of administration. They are expressions of sovereign decision, of *letting die and deliberately making bodies sick* rather than *making live*.

Agamben asserts that the camp is the nomos of the modern, the space where law is suspended and the human is reduced to life that can be killed but not sacrificed. Egyptian women's prisons, with their bureaucratic mazes and medical inertia, are modern camps. Medical care is formally present but functionally absent: military doctors prescribe birth control pills for migraines; surgical interventions are denied without State Security clearance; inmates must fight to have their medical histories acknowledged. In this regime, letting die becomes an instrument of power, a slow violence that replaces execution with abandonment, and care with containment. This is the sovereign logic of bare life in action.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I demonstrated how the Egyptian prison system operates as both a biopolitical and necropolitical apparatus on women political prisoners' bodies, which forms the overwhelming material condition of their exile. Through the regulation of food, water, space,

air, light, hygiene, and health, it disciplines the body in Foucauldian terms, optimizing it for survival only to the extent that it serves the carceral order. Simultaneously, through the orchestration of neglect, violence, and conditions that foster death, it performs Mbembe's Necropolitics, reducing it to its basic biological functions. Women's bodies become the terrain upon which sovereign power is etched: punished, neglected, and stripped of autonomy. The prison becomes not merely a place of detention, but akin to a death-world, which makes exile the only viable option for women, who were targeted, imprisoned, and subjected to this carceral violence for their activism. The picture I attempted to demonstrate here through the testimonies of the women activists I interviewed runs in stark contrast to exile in Said's terms, which focuses on the exiled intellectual life in a Western country and views exile as a metaphorical space of critical inquiry, almost a romantic one. The reality my interlocutors paint, even as they have left Egypt and escaped that reality of violence, still emphasizes its materiality and its ever-present effect on their lives in exile. Exile is, therefore, rooted in material conditions and realities that need to be accounted for in our analysis.

Chapter Four

Egyptian Women Between Home and Exile: (Trans)National Repression, Forced Exile, and Borderlands of State Violence

This chapter interrogates Egyptian women exiles' testimonies of state violence in borderlands of transition, particularly airports, border zones, and embassies. It examines the various registers through which the Egyptian state utilizes its sovereign power to implement forced

exile. It focuses on three interlinked terrains: first, the airport as a site of biopolitical management and sovereign exception; second, the borderlands between Egypt and Sudan as necropolitical spaces of exposure, abandonment, and illegalized flight; and third, the extraterritorial reach of the Egyptian state, where embassies and consulates become instruments of immobilization through the denial of basic civil documentation. Across these domains, exile is not merely a spatial displacement but a legal, affective, and epistemic condition shaped by the erosion of protection, dignity, and recognition. By centering the embodied testimonies of women activists, the chapter foregrounds how exile is materially enforced, unevenly gendered, and bureaucratically sustained through the post-colonial state's exercise of power to decide who belongs to the nation and who does not. I argue that exile here is produced through material regimes of state violence exercised in such borderlands, causing an ontological rupture, marked by the transition from citizen to exile subject under gendered regimes of fear, violence, and exclusion.

4.1 Airport as a Site of Surveillance, Control, and Repression

The women exiles' testimonies describe Egyptian airports as sites of control, surveillance, extra-judicial arrests of activists, arbitrary detention of activists, interrogations that last for hours, confiscation of activists' travel documents, and attempts at recruiting activists as informants.

Many women I interviewed told me that they were detained at the airport and interrogated by the National Security Agency, a specialized police agency that is responsible for policing terrorism and other perceived national security threats (Amnesty International, 2021), for prolonged hours, about the purpose of their travels and their activism. During such times of detention and illegal interrogations, they were not allowed to communicate with their families or lawyers.

One woman activist who lived abroad and returned to Cairo in 2017, intending to settle there, describes how she was stopped, interrogated, and had her passport confiscated at the Cairo International Airport, and how this repression, as a result, made her decide to leave and never come back:

> The interrogation at the airport lasted about six hours. I was first questioned in the new Terminal 2 for around an hour and a half, then taken in a microbus and moved between various offices. Eventually, I was brought to the main office and questioned by two additional officers. They told me I might be transferred elsewhere. But fortunately, a relative of ours—a general in State Security—intervened, which prevented my arrest. Still, they confiscated my passport. After several visits, they told me I would be allowed to travel, but only if I agreed to 'keep an eye out' and report back if I saw or heard anything in [name of country anonymized]. It was clear they wanted me to act as a kind of informant. I agreed immediately so they would let me go. I traveled and never came back.

Another woman journalist and activist, who was imprisoned for more than a year on terrorism charges, explained how, at a similar attempt to leave the country, she was told that she needed approval from the National Security Agency, after eight hours of interrogation and confiscation of her passport:

> I went to Cairo Airport intending to travel to the [name of country anonymized]. I had already cleared passport control and was waiting at the boarding gate when a National Security officer approached me. He took my passport and phone and told me I was on a travel ban and could not travel. I was taken to his office and interrogated for approximately eight hours. He said he needed to get approval from the main National Security headquarters in Abbasiyya before deciding whether I could leave. After the eight hours, he told me I would be released, but that the regional National Security

> office would follow up with me. Only if they approved, I might be allowed to travel again. My passport was not returned…Psychologically, I had reached a breaking point.

Another woman confirmed a similar incident, and how it had left her with the only option to leave Egypt through a smuggling route through Sudan:

> Initially, I had planned to travel to Beirut, but I was stopped at the airport in Cairo. My passport was confiscated, and I was told I would need to collect it from the National Security headquarters. However, several lawyers advised me not to go, warning me that doing so might expose me to further risk. I then tried to leave the country through official channels by offering to pay money at the airport. But I was told that security measures had intensified and that it was no longer possible. As a result, I was forced to leave Egypt illegally via a smuggling route through Sudan.

These measures of surveillance, control, and repression of women activists, most of whom were the subjects of carceral violence and its technologies of control and management of women's bodies, create a further climate of fear where the home become no longer safe and where leaving it becomes the only viable and safe option for survival. It is, in other words, a form of forced exile.

The testimonies of Egyptian women activists reveal how airports, often imagined as mundane transit spaces, become highly politicized zones of repression, surveillance, and forced exile. Within exile literature, such spaces are not neutral passageways but are understood as liminal zones, where power, violence, and displacement converge. As Naficy (2013) and Ahmed (2014) argue, borders and airports are saturated with emotional, legal, and political meaning, especially for racialized and gendered bodies marked by dissent.

The airport, in these narratives, functions as a threshold of both exclusion and transformation. The moment of being detained, interrogated, or asked to collaborate with the state is not simply an infringement of rights, but a moment of ontological transformation that

marks the transition from citizen to exile. As Edward Said (2002) writes, exile begins not with physical relocation but with the rupture between the individual and their homeland's capacity to protect, recognize, or accept them. In this sense, the state disowns its subjects, turning them into fugitives.

The accounts of interrogations, extra-legal detentions, confiscation of passports, and coercive recruitment efforts also mirror what Peteet (2005) terms the *politics of intimidation* used in other authoritarian and settler-colonial regimes to fragment resistance movements and compromise political agency. The National Security Agency's actions transform airports into sites of sovereign violence, where women are asked to choose between exile and complicity.

Ultimately, the airport becomes a threshold of forced exile, where the security apparatus's violence converges with the women's growing recognition that survival is only possible through departure.

4.2 Arbitrary Use of Travel Bans and Arrival Watch Lists by Security Agencies

In addition to these measures of surveillance, control, and repression at airports, women exiles describe being arbitrarily listed on Travel Ban and Arrival Watch Lists by the National Security Agency, which limit their ability both to leave the country as the only recourse to safety, and their right to return.

In all cases of the women I spoke to, there was no judicial order by which they were added to the travel ban or arrival watch lists. They were informed of the travel bans verbally at the airport by order of the National Security Agency, which lacks the legal authority to issue travel bans or list individuals on arrival watch lists (Amnesty International, 2021). Therefore, these measures do not operate within the bounds of legality and constitute a form of sovereign violence.

A woman exile told me how she was informed at the airport that she was on a travel ban and arrival watchlist:

> I was stopped at the airport in March 2017, right after finishing university. I had returned to Egypt intending to settle there. The strange thing was that I had only left the country four months earlier. As soon as my passport was scanned, it triggered a red flag. A security officer told me I was on a travel ban and an arrival watchlist. At that time, this kind of treatment toward women was still new. We hadn't heard of many cases like this unless it involved someone prominent in public life.

The fact that she had been in Egypt a few months earlier and entered and left the country safely was something that was echoed by other women I spoke to. It is often explained by how "chaotic" Egypt is. This, I believe, points to the arbitrary nature of sovereign and state violence. It also often makes it impossible to legally challenge these travel bans, as they were not issued through legal orders in the first place, but through security orders.

Another woman exile, whose passport got confiscated at the airport earlier, was not even informed by airport authorities that she was on a travel ban and arrival watch list. She explains:

> At first, my family and friends assumed it was a minor issue and that I could just book another flight. But it didn't work. My passport had already been confiscated. On the advice of someone I trusted, I immediately filed for a replacement passport before a formal travel block could be issued against me. I kept that new passport, hoping it might allow me to leave through some other route. Later, I contacted a lawyer, who told me to send a photo of the new passport. He said he knew someone at the airport who could check if I was listed on any watchlists. He got back to me and confirmed: 'You're on the arrival watchlist, even with this passport. You still won't be able to travel.'

> Apparently, even if you obtain a replacement passport, sometimes the travel ban still applies.

The arbitrary and retrospective nature of these travel bans—a woman returning safely one month, only to be flagged and detained the next—illustrates what Malkki (1995) and Zetter (2007) have described as the labile identity of the refugee/exile, where one's status is produced not by formal law but by mutable categories of suspicion. In such regimes, exile is not a fixed status but a shifting designation imposed through opaque and unaccountable logics of risk.

Not only were women activists themselves targeted by the Egyptian state for their activism, but also their families. One woman political activist who is a Muslim Brotherhood member tells me:

> My sister attempted to travel to visit our other siblings in Canada. She was stopped at the airport, her passport was confiscated, and she was denied permission to depart. Additionally, her laptop was searched, and she was subjected to interrogation. Subsequently, she was detained for approximately two weeks under a frivolous legal pretext before being released. To this day, it remains unclear whether these actions were directly related to me or pertained to her individually, although she has no known political activity. I suspect the measures were connected to my own circumstances.

The same woman exile adds how her circumstances made forced exile her only option:

> Upon learning that I was being sought by authorities following the arrest of members of the [Name of NGO where she worked], I left my residence and began relocating frequently within Egypt. Initially, I intended to remain within the country, continuously moving to avoid detection. However, the situation became increasingly perilous; I was unable to see or care for my children, and the risk escalated as more individuals were apprehended. Consequently, I was compelled to leave Egypt on the same day that [Names of NGO colleagues] were arrested. I was informed by legal contacts that

> security forces had raided my former residence, which I had already vacated, and found it empty.

The deeply gendered and corporeal dimensions of exile are sharply rendered in one woman's narrative. After she had spent more than two years in prison and was subjected to extreme and repeated torture, rape, and made to go to police probation for months after being released from prison, she finally had her police probation suspended. She went to try to secure a passport, only to find that she is on a travel ban and arrival watch list:

> I forgot to mention that after I got out of prison, I tried to apply for a passport. I was told I had a block on passport issuance. The officer tore up my application and told me to 'Go sort it out with them.' I paid someone to look into it, and they confirmed that my full record came up in the system: travel bans, charges, and case information. I was officially on the travel ban list and barred from obtaining a passport. I decided I had to leave Egypt. I had no passport and no other way out. Sudan was the only route.

Her exclusion is not just administrative; it is also embodied, violent, and arbitrary, enforced by security agencies under exceptional counter-terrorism measures, reinforcing what Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2015) calls carceral citizenship.

A woman exile describes how travel bans transform one's affective experience of home:

> Being subjected to a travel ban transforms familiar environments into sources of distress, as the restriction is imposed without clear justification or legal recourse. Despite the absence of formal charges or judicial orders, my name appeared on lists circulated by national security agencies, leading to inconsistent enforcement of the ban. The arbitrary nature of these restrictions fosters a sense of vulnerability and unpredictability, particularly upon re-entry into the country. The pivotal moment that solidified my decision not to return to Egypt was my father's imprisonment. This event

> underscored the risks associated with re-entry, especially given the experiences of other researchers and activists who faced detention upon arrival. Unless significant political changes occur, such as a nationwide uprising, I am unlikely to return. The hope for transformative change persists, akin to the enduring optimism held by displaced populations worldwide.

This quote is a good example of the ambivalent relationship to homeland in exile. As Naficy (2013) argues, exile can produce both nostalgia and alienation, a yearning for home intertwined with the recognition that home, as it once existed, may no longer be possible. It illustrates what Naficy (2013) refers to as "chronotopes of exile", the folding of hope, fear, nostalgia, and fatigue into a single psychological experience. The woman exile's statement is emblematic of the broader experience of exhausted hope. While the possibility of return is not entirely foreclosed, it is deferred indefinitely, tethered to a fantasy of political rupture that may never materialize.

This enduring suspension is central to what Peteet (2005)calls "temporal displacement", when the exile lives in a present that is perpetually postponed, unable to return and unable to fully re-anchor themselves elsewhere. The travel bans, irregular enforcement, and lack of legal clarity make return not only dangerous but governed by an inconsistent and illegible security logic. Thus, the homeland becomes inaccessible both geographically and existentially.

The women's accounts reveal how the discretionary apparatus of the National Security Agency's arbitrary use of travel bans and arrival watch lists, imposed without judicial orders and conveyed informally at airports, created the very condition of exile as the only possible option for survival. It enacts a form of what Agamben (1998) calls "bare sovereignty," where individuals are stripped of rights and held in zones of legal indistinction, as well as in liminal spaces that operate as nodes of sovereign exception (Feldman, 2015).

The women's consistent recourse to illegal escape routes through Sudan highlights the forced and gendered nature of exile. As Al-Sharmani (2010) and Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2015) argue, women experience displacement not just through physical expulsion but through the intimate and bodily risks they face in carceral states. These women are already subject to carceral technologies—such as probation, surveillance, and blacklisting, which operate not just to punish but to expel. The state ensures women cannot leave legally, but must expose themselves to physical danger to escape.

4.3 The Route to Turkey through Sudan as Necro-Borderland

Before the normalization of relations between Egypt and Turkey, Turkey was one of the main destinations for Egyptian opposition fleeing Egypt's prisons and death-worlds (Al Jazeera, 2021). According to the interviews I conducted, Turkey eased visa procedures for Egyptian critics on humanitarian grounds, even those who left Egypt illegally for Sudan. The "Sudan Route" became a famous route to Egyptian critics until the outbreak of war between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023 (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

I was told by women exiles, time and time again, that leaving the country illegally through the desert to Sudan was the only option they had. One woman said to me:

> Friends had offered several times to help me escape to Sudan, even when I was still under police probation, but I had always refused. I insisted that I hadn't done anything wrong and would only leave Egypt legally, through the front door. But between April and September, I continued trying to get permission to travel. The last response I received was, 'Don't open this topic with us again for another two or three years.'…That day, I finally broke down. I walked out, crying in the street. At home, when my mother asked what was wrong, I told her nothing. I just needed sleep**.** I later

> called a friend and said, 'I need to leave for Sudan or Libya, I just can't stay here anymore. Figure out how to get me out.' A week later, he had arranged my journey.

Another woman confirmed:

> I was forced to leave Egypt illegally via a smuggling route through Sudan. I stayed in Sudan for a month, sorting out the logistics of entering Turkey. Afterward, I spent two years in Turkey before arriving in Germany four months ago. That journey was my last resort. It's not the kind of decision that a rational person, especially a woman, would make.

The Sudan Route, as described in these narratives, operates as a necro-borderland, a space of extreme precarity, illegality, and abandonment. One woman exile describes to me the physical dangers of the Sudan Route:

> I decided I had to leave Egypt. I had no passport and no other way out. Sudan was the only route. I couldn't bear to go through anything else—not even with a guarantee of safety. The journey to Sudan was horrific. It took four days. From Cairo to Aswan took one full day. From there, we had to travel through remote villages. It was literally a smuggling route. We were trafficked like goods, nine men, one other woman, and me. At one point, we were shot at by border guards. Another time, the vehicle got stuck. We slept in the desert for 12 hours with no food, no water, just a fire for warmth. Eventually, we reached a strange village and stayed with people living in shacks for a night before moving on to Khartoum.

This crossing exemplifies what Malkki (1995) refers to as the *politics of bare life*, where displaced individuals are stripped of their legal personhood and reduced to "mere bodies" in motion.

In some cases, women described the paralyzing wait in border zones like Aswan, marked by silence, uncertainty, and fear, exacerbated by the fact that they were being required to have illegal scheduled National Security investigations at the time:

> I went to Aswan for 12 days before we began the journey. The next scheduled investigation with National Security came while I was still in Aswan, and I was terrified…After I reached Sudan, they called my father asking why I hadn't shown up. He told them we had a family argument, and I'd been gone for two weeks, unreachable. They said, 'When she shows up, tell her we need to see her.'

The financial costs associated with the Sudan Route fed on people's vulnerabilities. They made it largely inaccessible and delayed many opportunities to leave. In some cases, they got arrested by the Egyptian authorities before they managed to leave. Because of the borderlands of illegality, women activists often had to pay large sums of money to, for example, obtain replacement passports so they could have a travel document when they arrived in Sudan. Another woman said to me:

> I had reached the point where I was willing to pay any sum just to leave. A man at the airport once told me it would cost $12,000, and I agreed, despite having no idea how I would get the money. But two weeks later, he told me it was no longer possible.

These informal economies of flight illuminate what Zetter (1991) calls the bureaucratic labelling of refugees, where displaced persons are simultaneously commodified and criminalized. Their illegality becomes a marketable condition, an opportunity for extraction.

The same woman who was shot at through the desert, was on a travel ban, and was refused the issuance of a passport, tells me how she left for Sudan without a passport. This move speaks volumes about the danger, desperation, and fear she was in. "I managed to get a

passport from Egypt, but only by paying 7,000 USD," she told me. Then she proceeds through months of legal limbo and borderlands of illegality:

> I remained in Sudan for two months….I then flew to Istanbul with an e-visa. My ticket showed Egypt as transit, but I entered Istanbul. I was detained at the airport for an entire day; they didn't want to let me in. It was a Sunday, and offices were closed, so the people helping me had to make a lot of calls. Eventually, I was allowed to enter after purchasing a visa at the airport. The moment I entered Istanbul, I was overwhelmed. I couldn't believe it. While I was still in Sudan, I nearly got deported twice from the airport. I was terrified. To this day, I experience panic attacks at airports. Even now, when I travel, say, to Tunisia, I cry and tremble at passport control. Different countries, but they all feel the same. Every border officer evokes the same fear.

As Hamid Naficy (2013) explains, forced exile often induces a form of "liminal subjectivity," where individuals live in a state of suspension between legality and illegality, presence and absence. Borders and airport security become enduring sites of re-traumatization, what Ahmed (2014) would describe as "affective economies," where fear and vulnerability are constantly re-circulated through encounters with state institutions. As Said (2002) makes clear, exile is not a remedy; it is the rift, a scar, forced between an individual and their homeland. For many women fleeing Egypt's security state, the Sudan Route was not an escape, but a passage through danger into a new geography of fear, one in which *home* becomes a deferred dream, and safety a provisional illusion.

The Sudan Route can be described as a necro-borderland, a geopolitical and embodied space of suspension where state and non-state actors enforce violence through abandonment, deterritorialization, and logistical death (Debrix & Barder, 2013; Jones, 2016). The necro-borderland is a threshold of bare survival, where women are neither inside nor outside the state, neither entirely abandoned nor fully controlled, but subjected to arbitrary exposure to harm.

Women's testimonies of the dangers they faced through the Sudan Route echo what Mbembe (2003) calls the spatialization of death. In these zones, the state either withdraws or intensifies its presence in lethal ways. The state's will to let die operates not only through direct violence, although that was also reported, but through the delegation of violence to smugglers, terrain, and hunger.

These in-between spaces create a paralyzing affective atmosphere: indefinite waiting, administrative silence, and the looming threat of recapture. These women's journeys are not a linear progression from point A to B, but a recursive, traumatic temporality marked by rupture and deferral. The in-between status of these women, marked by loss of home, legality, and recognition, positions them in zones of non-belonging. They are neither citizens nor refugees in the legal sense, but figures of exile whose movement is criminalized and whose suffering is normalized.

4.4 Transnational Repression: Refusal to Renew Passports, IDs, Birth Certificates, and Other Official Documents

The Egyptian State extends its repression to women exiles through its transnational bureaucracies abroad, namely, consulates, by refusing or stalling the renewal of their passports, identity documents, their children's birth certificates, and other official documents. While this was not limited to women exiles only, it had specific gendered dimensions that disproportionately affected women, often putting them at security risk where they were forced to return to Egypt and faced prolonged detention.

The Egyptian embassy in Turkey, a country that was once one of the main destinations for Egyptian critics, was reportedly the most brutal when it came to refusing to renew Egyptians' official documents. One woman exile in Istanbul told me:

> When your passport expires, the embassy simply refuses to renew it. Many people have already tried and were told to go back to Egypt for renewals. A recent case involved an Egyptian man in Turkey who had an expired passport and residence permit. He was detained by Turkish authorities and charged with working without a license.

The Egyptian embassy in Turkey tells Egyptian critics to go back to Egypt to renew their passports and get official documents issued or renewed, where they would face the risk of interrogation, detention, and torture.. They also require a security clearance for official documents, which leaves many without essential documents, forcing them into a legal limbo, as one woman exile told me:

> My passport and national ID are with me, but they are expiring. My passport is close to expiring completely. I applied in 2020 for passports for my daughters at the Egyptian consulate in Istanbul. They took the money, gave me receipts, but never issued the passports. They now tell everyone to go back to Egypt to complete the process. I went to the embassy to authorize a power of attorney for a lawyer, but they refused to give me security clearance for the authorization.

Another woman exile echoed this, with an emphasis on the additional security risks that women critics faced as a result, including having to go back to Egypt to renew their or their children's official documents and facing detention for prolonged periods:

> In the Egyptian embassy in Turkey, they almost never process paperwork, especially when it comes to renewing passports or issuing birth certificates. This has been the case for the past four years, and the situation continues to deteriorate. Currently, only around 5% of applicants receive renewed passports, often after a delay of up to two years, and only after paying large sums. Many people paid and never received any response, neither approval nor rejection.

The gendered dimensions of caring for children are clear. As it is seen as primarily a woman's responsibility, it is often women who take the risk of going back to Egypt to take care of their children's documents, facing the risk of detention.

Another woman exile in Turkey I spoke to told me of the legal limbo they were in as a result of the embassy's refusal to issue her son a birth certificate, making him stateless, unable to access essential health care, and unable to travel or move freely:

> My son was born in Turkey and still has no birth certificate. We've been trying for a year and a half and still haven't received approval. The papers were stamped by the embassy and then sent to the Foreign Birth Registration Department in Abbasiya, Cairo. When my family went to extract the certificate, they were told to make three copies of the documents, as each security agency would need a set, and we had to wait for clearance from all of them. My son is now a year and a half old. We've been trying to apply for exceptional residency status for a year with no success. Without that, he cannot access hospital care. He received his vaccinations up until he turned one, but after that, the authorities refused to provide further vaccines without a passport or valid residency. We're stuck. We can't travel to another country without documentation. He is essentially stateless. Our passports and national IDs are about to expire. My husband's ID has already expired. We tried to renew it at the consulate in Istanbul, but they refused and told us to go to Egypt. We also tried to obtain a family registration record from Egypt, but it was denied because my husband's ID had expired.

This repression is not uniformly applied but is arbitrary in nature, reflecting the capricious logic of authoritarian governance. Many are forced to navigate this legal limbo created by the Egyptian embassy in Turkey by going to other countries, such as Qatar, where the Egyptian embassy is known to renew people's passports promptly and without requiring security clearance. As one woman exile in Turkey told me:

> Thank God I was eventually able to renew my passport, but the process caused enormous anxiety. The Egyptian embassy in Turkey is among the worst in the world. We applied, waited for a year or two, and still couldn't get the renewal. I had to go through Qatar to complete the process. When I submitted my paperwork there, the passport was issued immediately. I know people who couldn't register their children, couldn't get them vaccinated, and had no legal papers for them at all. Personally, I only faced trouble renewing my own documents, but many others in Istanbul remain trapped without any documentation. Some have been effectively detained for long periods simply because they couldn't renew their documents.

This quote resonates with Zetter's (1991) argument about the "labeling" of exiles, where bureaucratic identity becomes fluid and dependent on local diplomatic conditions and informal networks of power. This arbitrariness deepens the uncertainty that exiles experience, as their legal status and future remain at the mercy of the state.

Another woman exile, however, speaks of the arbitrary nature of renewing passports in different Egyptian embassies across the world:

> I renewed my passport once while in Qatar and received it just a day or two after applying. I am now considering renewing it again in the coming months, also in Qatar. If it gets renewed, that's good; if not, then I'll leave it to fate. The Egyptian authorities in Qatar generally process renewals for Egyptian nationals without issue; the real bureaucratic bottleneck is in Turkey, where not even birth certificates are being issued. My ex-husband's passport was recently stolen in Vienna. He was just two years away from obtaining permanent residency. When he tried to apply for a new passport, the Austrian authorities said the request would require a one-month security clearance from Egypt. Only then would they determine whether the renewal would be approved. I've heard that these security checks are common, even in Berlin. But ironically, some

> people on terrorist watchlists have had their passports renewed without problems, even in Qatar. It seems arbitrary."

So, the transnational repression through bureaucratic constraints in renewing or issuing official documents is not limited to Turkey. A woman in exile I interviewed describes similar bureaucratic constraints she faced at the Egyptian embassy in Somalia:

> The reason we were trying to leave Somalia is that our son is now one year and one month old, and he still has no birth certificate, passport, ID, or any document confirming his existence. We tried countless times to register him in Egypt, but it was impossible; the authorities refused… Even during my pregnancy, I was trying every possible avenue to register the child, but to no avail. Eventually, we decided to save money for two years so that he could travel to Turkey and apply for asylum. Once he submits the official asylum paperwork for the child, he will notify me so that I can move based on the outcome of his application."

In addition, a woman exile in Brazil and a dual national spoke of gendered dimensions of these difficulties, and how she required her husband's consent to renew her Egyptian passport, making the process doubly complicated for her as a woman:

> I cannot renew my Egyptian passport without my husband's consent. The Egyptian embassy outright refused to renew it unless his name was added to the document. This adds another layer of suffering. Additionally, in Brazil, I cannot register the child in the father's name without an official, notarized authorization from him. Thankfully, I have the liberty and legal option here to register my children under my name alone.

She spoke to me eloquently of her hopes and fears of obtaining Egyptian citizenship for her children, how bureaucratic steps in exile can trigger security scrutiny at home:

> We are facing severe obstacles in obtaining documentation for our children. None of my kids has a single official Egyptian document. My husband is deeply reluctant to

> initiate any form of registration in Egypt, not even a birth certificate, because he knows that security files in Egypt are never forgotten or closed, no matter how much time passes or political contexts change. He fears the long-term consequences of our past political affiliations being extended to our children… We still hold hope. Our children's birth certificates state that both parents are Egyptian. So if things improve in the future, perhaps they can return and obtain citizenship and passports themselves. At one point, I went to the Egyptian embassy in Turkey to request a document known as a "Name Certificate." Shortly after, my uncle received a phone call from acquaintances asking, 'What is your niece doing in Turkey?' indicating that even minor bureaucratic steps can trigger security scrutiny."

The hope that "maybe in the future our children can go back" resonates with the politics of deferred return (Said, 2002). This hope is shaped not only by longing but by the bureaucratic impossibility of return under the current regime. What is maintained is not necessarily the dream of homeland but the *right to belong* to a state that has erased them administratively, legally, and symbolically.

Human Rights Watch documented this in its report "Exile or Prison" (Magdy, 2023), which details the Egyptian government's systematic denial of essential identity documents, such as passports, national IDs, and birth certificates, as a tactic to keep the Egyptian citizens who are perceived as critics or dissidents of the state in a precarious position abroad: without their legal documents, their ability to work, travel, or access services in the host countries is hindered and while returning to Egypt bears the risk of arrest, imprisonment, or torture. This strategy extends the state's repressive reach beyond its borders, effectively punishing critics even in exile and deterring others from speaking out against the regime.

The refusal to issue official documents traps families in a suspended state of citizenship. This tactic aligns with what Glasius (2018) refers to as "transnational authoritarianism," where

regimes use informal coercion, threats, and bureaucratic hindering to extend their control beyond borders.

The fear of returning to Egypt, where potential detention, surveillance, or torture await, is pervasive. However, the inability to renew documents abroad traps exiles in immobile exile, leaving them unable to work, travel, or access essential services. This condition is what Naficy (2013) refers to as a "liminal exile," wherein individuals are caught between legality and illegality, presence and absence, safety and risk. These spaces of legal limbo are not incidental but systemically produced necropolitical zones of bureaucratic limbo and neglect (Mbembe, 2003).

This bureaucratic warfare also generates affective consequences. As Ahmed (2014) notes, the repetition of emotional trauma, particularly the anxiety, humiliation, and exhaustion tied to failed bureaucratic processes, accumulates in the body. Women exiles report panic, despair, and paralysis not only from their past experiences of state violence but from the constant stress of waiting, appealing, and being ignored. Bureaucracy thus becomes not only a technical structure but an affective regime of exile.

These actions transform Egyptian consulates into extensions of the carceral state, enforcing exile not just through banishment but through immobilization, silence, and statelessness. This practice builds on Shenhav's (2006) notion of *postcolonial bureaucratic sovereignty*, where authoritarian states manipulate legal documents as instruments of political loyalty, punishing dissenters even outside the national territory.

The gendered nature of these bureaucratic obstructions is clear. As the testimonies show, care work and bureaucratic responsibilities for children's documentation disproportionately fall on women, consistent with broader literature on the feminization of responsibility in exile (Al-Sharmani, 2010; Chatty, 2010). Women are often the ones dealing

with consuls, filling out paperwork, and physically returning to Egypt to obtain documents, therefore risking detention, interrogation, and torture.

4.5 Conclusion: Necropolitical Borderlands, Exclusion from Citizenship and Forced Exile

The testimonies of Egyptian women subjected to surveillance, repression, interrogations, and control at airports, as well as arbitrary administration of travel bans, arrival watchlists, and being forced to leave their homelands through the illegal, precarious, and dangerous Sudan route reveal the intricate interplay between sovereign power, legality, and violence.

From women's testimonies, we see how the airport becomes a site of surveillance, arbitrary and illegal interrogations, confiscations of activists' passports, attempts to recruit them as informants, arbitrary detentions, and control by the National Security Agency, under the pretext of counter terrorism. It exemplifies how the state of exception becomes normalized, allowing for the suspension of rights and exclusion of activists from the realm of legality. The confiscation of passports by security agencies, which forces them to escape through the Sudan route, places them in a necropolitical landscape where death, danger, and illegality dominate mobility (Davies et al., 2017).

The arbitrary use of travel bans and arrival watchlists as a tool of control further underscores the state's capacity to delineate who belongs to the nation and who does not. These measures transform women's lives into what Mbembe terms "death-worlds", zones where individuals are not killed outright but are denied the protections of law, justice, and fundamental human rights, rendering them socially and politically dead (Mbembe, 2003). By restricting movement, the state not only asserts its sovereignty but also restricts citizenship rights and enforces a form of social death, where women activists are cut off from the homeland and are forced into exile through the necropolitical borderland of the Sudan route.

When women activists finally make it to a safe destination, the Egyptian state extends its repression transnationally through its bureaucracies by refusing to renew passports, IDs, birth certificates, and other official documents, asking for security clearances and telling women to to go back to Egypt to get necessary documents where many women then face prolonged detention. This deprives women critics in exile of the right to return to their home country and puts them in an endless states of legal limbo, which have disproportionate gendered effects on women.

Denying civil documentation, including birth certificates and passports, is a form of bureaucratic punishment and enforced immobility that renders individuals and their children stateless or trapped in zones of illegality. This aligns with broader frameworks of biopolitical control, where states exercise power not only through force but through the selective suspension of rights and documentation (Agamben, 1998; Foucault, 1977).

Here, power is exercised through exposure to death, disappearance, or indefinite exclusion from the national body and citizenship rights (Mbembe, 2003). Women exiles were forced into a state where not only were their legal rights suspended, but they were also subjected to a form of civil death, an exclusion from legal, social, and political life. By making it impossible for them to go back to their homeland without the risk of detention and torture, and putting them in endless states of legal limbo, the Egyptian state not only denies women exiles the right to return to their homeland, but also constitutes a form of annihilation of the right to have rights (Arendt, 2017).

The testimonies of women exiles from Egypt presented in this section illuminate necropolitical violence through mechanisms of state surveillance, arbitrary restriction, and gendered repression. These mechanisms do not operate within clear legal parameters. However, they are instead rooted in discretionary sovereign power that blurs legality, rendering

individuals as *legally unrecognizable subjects*, a hallmark of both biopolitical and necropolitical governance (Mbembe, 2003; Foucault, 2003).

The material experiences detailed in this chapter, as I have demonstrated, create the conditions that transform one's experience from that of a citizen to a non-citizen. Through the framework of necropolitics, I demonstrated how the Egyptian security state delineates, through its arbitrary exercise of sovereign power, those who belong to the nation and those who do not. Exile here is not simply the loss of territorial belonging and a metaphorical state of in-betweenness, but a material reality of violence, precarity, and displacement from both the legal, physical, and affective orders of the homeland that persists long after physical arrival at a safe destination. The over-emphasis on power structures in exile (almost always a Western country, in Said's terms overshadows post-colonial state violence that exiled the exiled subject in the first place.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to reframe the conceptualization of exile through a materialist and gender-sensitive lens, centering on the lived experiences of Egyptian women activists in exile. By engaging critically with Edward Said's influential framework on exile, which casts exile as a metaphorical space for intellectual and ethical reflection, I have demonstrated that such a framing, while intellectually generative, risks effacing the brutal, material conditions through which exile is produced in contexts of authoritarian repression. As argued in my theoretical and conceptual chapter, I find the frameworks of biopoltics and necropoltics better suited to capture the materiality of the condition of exile as it pertains to Egyptian women.

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on women exiles' experiences of torture and sexual and gender-based violence inside the carceral system. Using a biopolitical and necropolitical framework, I understood these practices as embedded within Egypt's carceral institutions that aim to punish, degrade, humiliate, and control the women detainees' bodies as part of their logic. Through women's testimonies, I found that torture and SGBV are systemic practices that women exiles experienced by the carceral system in Egypt as a result of their activism, and that these material realities created the very condition of exile, as forced exile became the only safe option for survival to escape the Egyptian security state.

The third chapter engaged with the various technologies of discipline and control over women exiles' bodies inside carceral facilities, through the administration (or lack thereof) and control over food, water, space, air, light, hygiene, and health, using a biopolitical and necropolitical framework. I found that the carceral system disciplines women's bodies, optimizing them for survival, to the extent that it serves the carceral order, while simultaneously fostering structural conditions that promote death and disease and reduce women detainees' bodies to their bare biological functions. The extreme material conditions in carceral facilities that women activists suffered from, I found, make forced exile the only viable and safe option after they are released from prison. The women exiles' realities continue to be shaped by these traumatic experiences, which run in stark contrast to Said's characterization of exile as a metaphorical space of critical inquiry that privileges the exiled intellectual.

The fourth chapter examined Egyptian airports as sites of surveillance, control, and repression, including the arbitrary use of travel bans and arrival watch lists by security agencies. It also explored the route to Turkey through Sudan as a necro-borderland and transnational repression through the refusal to renew passports and other official documents. I found that, once again, these material experiences of violence within the borderlands of airports, illegality, and embassies are an integral part of Egyptian women exiles' experiences. Through its arbitrary

exercise of sovereign power, even beyond its borders, the Egyptian security state delineates who belongs and who does not, transforming women exiles from citizens to non-citizens.

My overall argument has been that exile is not a mere experience of metaphorical loss or a critical ontological condition. The picture I tried to paint, through my interlocutors' lived experiences, is one rooted in material experiences of physical, sexual, carceral, and legal violence and dislocation. The second and equally important part of my argument is that the over-emphasis on imperial power within exile literature has often obscured post-colonial state violence that created the exile subject in the first place. Testimonies by my interlocutors, who are Egyptian women activists, were overwhelmingly concerned with the violence they experienced in and by the post-colonial Egyptian state.

Moreover, this thesis bridges a critical gap between scholarly and activist discourses on exile in the MENA region. While academic treatments often privilege the role of Western imperialism in structuring exile, the activist narratives I engage emphasize the violence of post-colonial authoritarian regimes. I think this is in large part due to the particularity of Palestinian exile relative to the rest of the region and Said's influence within post-colonial studies. While Palestinian exile is predominantly caused by settler colonial power and occupation, this is not the case for the rest of the region, where exile is primarily the result of post-colonial state violence.

What emerges from the testimonies in this research is a demand for a more expansive and politically accountable understanding of exile, one that does not flatten the complexity of displacement into a singular metaphor, but instead attends to the multiple, material forms of violence that produce it. The Egyptian state does not merely respond to activism. It seeks to annihilate the bodies of women political prisoners through the production of conditions that reduce their bodies to their bare life, subject them to bodily degradation, and produce conditions of death. The carceral regime, as described by women political prisoners, is not

exceptional but a normalized system of governance that targets political activists with gendered repression. The prison becomes a site not just of punishment, but of epistemic erasure, a space in which women are silenced, shamed, and stripped of political legibility.

This re-theorization of exile also brings into focus the temporal and spatial dimensions of repression. Exile does not begin at the moment of border crossing, nor does it end with asylum or resettlement. It is a protracted process, one that begins in the prison cell, in the interrogation room, at the airport checkpoint, in border zones, and continues in the bureaucracies of immigration, embassies, and the psychological toll of permanent displacement.

The shift from metaphor to materiality has both methodological and political implications. It demands that scholars of exile move beyond literary analyses to engage with embodied testimonies, institutional structures, and the emotional economies of state violence. It also requires a feminist ethics of listening, which honors the specificity of women's experiences. Furthermore, this thesis contributes to broader debates in feminist, postcolonial, and immigration studies by demonstrating how exile is produced through intersecting forms of gendered, racialized, and classed violence. It argues that the exile of Egyptian women activists must be situated within the specific histories and structures of post-colonial authoritarianism in Egypt. In this sense, the thesis aligns with and extends recent scholarship that calls for decolonizing the study of exile and re-centering voices from post-colonial contexts within their own histories and conditions.

Theorizing exile in our contemporary world means accounting for the realities of violence, displacement, and dispossession under authoritarian regimes, as well as recognizing that exile is not an abstract or metaphorical condition but a material reality created by state power, and that its consequences disproportionately affect women's bodies. This thesis is thus both an academic contribution and a political intervention. It calls on scholars, activists, and

policymakers to rethink the terms of the debate around exile, and to center the voices of those who live its realities. It asks that we reject frameworks that romanticize exile or universalize its meaning and instead engage with its concrete manifestations as told by those who have endured it.

In honoring the testimonies of Egyptian women exiles, this thesis insists on the urgency of feminist, anti-authoritarian, and decolonial approaches to exile. It reminds us that the work of scholarship is not only to interpret the world but to stand in solidarity with those who struggle to transform it.

Bibliography

Abd El-Hameed, D. (2016, September 3). For the women of Egypt, today is not like yesterday. *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights*. https://eipr.org/en/blog/dalia-abd-el-hameed/2016/03/women-egypt-today-not-yesterdayhttps://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem011

Abdel Aziz, B. M. (2007). Torture in Egypt. *Torture: Quarterly Journal on Rehabilitation of Torture Victims and Prevention of Torture*, *17*(1), 48–52.

Abdel Aziz, B. M. (2014). *Memory of Repression: A Study of the Torture System*. Dar Al-Tanweer.

Abdel Halim, A. (2023). *Who Owns The Right To The Body: An In Depth Reading Into Egyptian Prison Life*. Umam Documentation and Research Institute.

Abdel-Fadil, M. (2014). *Sowing the Seeds of The Message Islamist Women Activists Before During and After the Egyptian Revolution*.

https://www.academia.edu/30575739/Sowing_the_Seeds_of_The_Message_Islamist_Women_Activists_Before_During_and_After_the_Egyptian_Revolution

Abdel-lateef, S. Z. (2013). Emancipatory futures: Women and agitational politics in revolutionary Egypt. *Theses and Dissertations*. https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/940

Affan, M. (2024). *Authoritarian Upgrading: The Dynamics of Exile Politics and Transnational Repression*. Ira Journal. Retrieved 24 January 2025, from https://irajournal.academy/en/2024/03/13/authoritarian-upgrading/

Affan, M. (2024). Political Islam in Exile: Transformation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood After the Military Coup of 2013. In T. Jäger & R. Thiele (Eds.), *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe: Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond* (pp. 247–261). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46173-6_15

Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford University Press.

Agamben, G. (2008). *State of exception*. University of Chicago Press.

Ahmed, S. (2014). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (NED-New edition, 2). Edinburgh University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x4q

Al Jazeera. (2021, April 15). *Turkish delegation to visit Egypt for 'normalisation' talks*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/15/turkish-delegation-to-visit-egypt-for-normalisation-talks

Al-Ali, N. (2007). Iraqi Women in Diasporic Spaces: Political Mobilization, Gender & Citizenship. *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans et de La Méditerranée, 117–118*, Article 117–118. https://doi.org/10.4000/remmm.3371

Al-Ali, N. (2012). Gendering the Arab Spring. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, *5*, 26–31. https://doi.org/10.1163/187398612X624346

Al-Anani, K. (2023). *Sisi's Transnational Repression: Silencing Political Dissidents in Exile*. Arab Center Washington DC. https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/sisis-transnational-repression-silencing-political-dissidents-in-exile/

Al-Salibi, R. (2022). *Affective Geographies: Borders, Home, Belonging and Futurity in Palestinian, Syrian and Iraqi Exile Literature*. https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/131964

Al-Sharmani, M. (2010). Transnational family networks in the Somali diaspora in Egypt: Women's roles and differentiated experiences. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *17*(4), 499–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2010.485843

Alwaqaa, M. A. M. (2025). Manifestations of exile and diaspora in the poetry of Abdullah al-Baradouni. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *0*(0), Article 0. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2024.2405675

Amnesty International. (2019). *Egypt: Permanent State of Exception: Abuses by the Supreme State Security Prosecution*. Retrieved 11 January 2024, from https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/1399/2019/en/

Amnesty International. (2021). *Egypt: "What do I care if you die?": Negligence and denial of health care in Egyptian prisons*. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/3538/2021/en/

Amnesty International. (2021, September 16). Egypt: "This will only end when you die": National Security Agency harassment of activists in Egypt. *Amnesty International*. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde12/4665/2021/en/

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.

Ardovini, L., & Mabon, S. (2019). Egypt's unbreakable curse: Tracing the State of Exception from Mubarak to Al Sisi. *Mediterranean Politics*, *25*(2), 456–475. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2019.1582170

Arendt, H. (2017). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Penguin Classics.

Barbour, J. D. (2007). Edward Said and the Space of Exile. *Literature and Theology*, *21*(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frm026

Baser, B. (2017). Intricacies of Engaging Diasporas in Conflict Resolution and Transitional Justice: The Kurdish Diaspora and the Peace Process in Turkey. *Civil Wars*, *19*(4), 470–494. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2017.1396528

Baser, B., & Halperin, A. (2019). Diasporas from the Middle East: Displacement, Transnational Identities and Homeland Politics. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *46*(2), 215–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2019.1569308

Caruso, C. (2018). The Syrian diaspora in London through the transnational lens: A distinctive contribution to contemporary public space and citizenship. *Border Crossing*, *8*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.33182/bc.v8i2.604

Caswell, M., & Cifor, M. (2019). Neither a beginning nor an end: Applying an ethics of care to digital archival collections. In *The Routledge International Handbook of New Digital Practices in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums and Heritage Sites*. Routledge.

Chatty, D. (2010). *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511844812

Davies, T., Isakjee, A., & Dhesi, S. (2017). Violent Inaction: The Necropolitical Experience of Refugees in Europe. *Antipode*, *49*(5), 1263–1284. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12325

Deblasio, L.-M. (2022). *On doing reflexivity and being 'trauma-informed' in feminist research*. *Feminist Legal Studies*, *30*(3), 351–374. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10691-022-09487-5

Debrix, F., & Barder, A. (2013). *Beyond Biopolitics: Theory, Violence, and Horror in World*

Politics. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203804810

Dunne, M., Hamzawy, A. (2019). *Egypt's Political Exiles: Going Anywhere but Home*. Retrieved 9 January 2024, from https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/03/29/egypt-s-political-exiles-going-anywhere-but-home-pub-78728

Egyptian Front for Human Rights. (2024, September 30). Transnational Repression: Targeting Egyptian Human Rights Defenders Abroad. *Egyptian Front for Human Rights*. https://egyptianfront.org/2024/09/transnational-repression-targeting-egyptian-human-rights-defenders-abroad/

El Captan, N. (2023). Narrating Egyptian Women's Prison Experiences-El Saadawi and Bakr. *The Undergraduate Research Journal*, *9*(1), 8.

Elsehamy, E. M. (2020). *The Screams of The Butterfly: An Ethnography of Exiled Egyptian Political Activists in Berlin*. Central European University.

England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer*, *46*(1), 80–89. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x

Exiled Activism: Political Mobilization in Egypt and England. (n.d.). Routledge & CRC Press. Retrieved 24 January 2025, from https://www.routledge.com/Exiled-Activism-Political-Mobilization-in-Egypt-and-England/McKeever/p/book/9780367611149

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (2003). *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Allen Lane.

Frada, R. (2023). State Violence Against Women in Egypt's Prisons: Gendering Bodies and Space 2/2. *Institut Du Genre En Géopolitique*. https://igg-geo.org/en/2023/12/13/state-violence-against-women-in-egypts-prisons-gendering-bodies-and-space-2-2/

France24. (2021, January 25). *'You don't have a country': Ten years after Egypt uprise, exiles disillusioned*. France 24. https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210125-you-don-t-have-a-country-ten-years-after-egypt-uprise-exiles-disillusioned

Fulco, C., & Abdelgawad, D. S. (n.d.). A movement in exile: The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's survival action frames in the post-coup era (2013–2023). *The Journal of North African Studies*, *0*(0), 1–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2024.2369092

Gaweesh, O. (2021, February 9). 'I will never give up': Egypt's exiles still dream of democracy. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/09/i-will-never-give-up-

Gilbert, S. M. (2021). *Correlates of Sexual Violence in Protest Spaces: Evidence from the Egyptian Revolution* [Master thesis]. https://www.duo.uio.no/handle/10852/88576

Glasius, M. (2018). Extraterritorial authoritarian practices: A framework. *Globalizations*, *15*(2), 179–197. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2017.1403781

Hafez, S. (2014). Bodies That Protest: The Girl in the Blue Bra, Sexuality, and State Violence in Revolutionary Egypt. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *40*(1), 20–28. https://doi.org/10.1086/676977

Halperin, A. (2018). *The Use of New Media by the Palestinian Diaspora in the United Kingdom*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. https://www.cambridgescholars.com/product/978-1-5275-0659-6

Hamdy, S. (2025). *Women in Egypt's Prisons: Bodies Without Rights*. Retrieved 1 June 2025, from https://zawia3.com/en/female-prisoners/

Hamzawy, A. (2017). Egypt after the 2013 military coup: Law-making in service of the new authoritarianism. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, *43*(4–5), 392–405. https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453717695367

Harding, S. (2004). *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political*

Controversies. Routledge.

Heijthuyzen, M. (2018). Sexual Violence and its Resistance in Post-revolutionary Egypt: At the intersection between authoritarianism and patriarchy. *The Journal of Law, Social Justice and Global Development, 21*, Article 21. https://doi.org/10.31273/LGD.2018.2105

Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books.

Human Rights Watch. (2017). "We Do Unreasonable Things Here." *Human Rights Watch*. https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/09/06/we-do-unreasonable-things-here/torture-and-national-security-al-sisis-egypt

Human Rights Watch. (2020, October 1). *Egypt: Security Forces Abuse, Torture LGBT People*. Retrieved 9 January 2024, from https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/01/egypt-security-forces-abuse-torture-lgbt-people

Human Rights Watch. (2023). Sudan: Events of 2023. In *World Report 2024*. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/sudan

ICJ. (2023). *Egypt: Torture so Widespread and Systematic as to Constitute a Crime Against Humanity*. International Commission of Jurists. https://www.icj.org/resource/egypt-torture-so-widespread-and-systematic-as-to-constitute-a-crime-against-humanity/

Jabiri, A. (2017). gendered politics of alienation and power restoration: Arab revolutions and women's sentiments of loss and despair. *Feminist Review*, *117*, 113–130.

Jones, R. (2016). *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move*. Verso Books.

Kadhum, O. (2021). The UK Iraqi Diaspora and their Mobilization towards Iraq: Homeland Politics, Internal Dynamics, and the Fragmentation of Diasporic Transnationalism. *Arab Reform Initiative*. https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-uk-iraqi-diaspora-and-their-mobilization-towards-iraq-homeland-politics-internal-dynamics-

and-the-fragmentation-of-diasporic-transnationalism/

Lal, V. (2005). *Enigmas of Exile: Reflections on Edward Said*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4416006?casa_token=9X4EDprl-S8AAAAA%3A-l1GBlxi-BJrRZJJ-PdpVT3e22pevgPSj39aBvivNvXdr5ipOTEAZ2sjawn6xq3eXj9nGch3akNlr0dHKStSBuXz8VD0eAa0xTvcd2bUWwBYmIV9NRB5&seq=1

Magdy, A. (2023, March 28). Exile or Prison: Egypt's Offer To Critics Abroad. *Human Rights Watch*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/28/exile-or-prison-egypts-offer-critics-abroad

Magdy, S. (2023, April 19). Women in Egypt's Prisons: Tales of Oppression, Abuse and Human Rights Violations. *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy* -. https://timep.org/2023/04/19/women-in-egypts-prisons-tales-of-oppression-abuse-and-human-rights-violations/

Malkki, L. H. (1995). *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo3624883.html

Mandour, M. (2021). *'Always an outsider': The Egyptians in exile both abroad and at home*. openDemocracy. Retrieved 24 January 2025, from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/egyptian-exile-abroad-home/

Mandour, M. (2022, March 23). A Homeland Lives Within Us, But We Cannot Live in It: Egyptian Organizing and Activism from Exile. *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy* -. https://timep.org/2022/03/23/a-homeland-lives-within-us-but-we-cannot-live-in-it-egyptian-organizing-and-activism-from-exile/

Mandour, M. (2023). *Egypt under el-Sisi: A nation on the edge*. I.B Tauris.

Mandour, M., & Lakhal, M. (2024). Interview with Author Maged Mandour: Egypt under El Sisi, a New Brand of Authoritarianism. *Arab Reform Initiative*. https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/interview-with-author-maged-mandour-egypt-under-el-sisi-a-new-brand-of-authoritarianism/

Mbembe, A. (2003). Necropolitics (L. Meintjes, Trans.). *Public Culture, 15*(1), 11–40.

McKeever, D. (2019). Rumour and decertification in exile politics: Evidence from the Egyptian case. *Globalizations, 16*(7), 1247–1261. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2019.1586116

Meari, L., Pratt, N., & Said, M. E. (Eds.). (2015). Introduction: Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance in the Arab World. In *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World*. https://www.academia.edu/25837416/Rethinking_Gender_in_Revolutions_and_Resistance_Lessons_from_the_Arab_world

Memarian, O. (2023, August 7). 'Egypt's Problem Now Is Cruelty.' Ayman Nour on Life in Exile and the Magnitude of Sisi's Repression. *DAWN*. https://dawnmena.org/egypts-problem-now-is-cruelty-ayman-nour-on-life-in-exile-and-the-magnitude-of-sisis-repression/

Meriem, H. B. (2021). *In Praise of Exile? The Case of Somali Writer Nuruddin Farah*. *6*.

Michaelsen, M. (2018). Exit and voice in a digital age: Iran's exiled activists and the authoritarian state. *Globalizations, 15*(2), 248–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1263078

Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press.

Moss, D. M. (2016). Transnational Repression, Diaspora Mobilization, and the Case of The Arab Spring. *Social Problems, 63*(4), 480–498.

https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spw019

Mourad, S. (2014). The Naked Body of Alia: Gender, Citizenship, and the Egyptian Body Politic. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *38*(1), 62–78.

Naficy, H. (2013). *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*. Routledge.

Navigating Exile: Responses from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. (2023, October 27). *Middle East Centre*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2023/10/27/navigating-exile-responses-from-the-egyptian-muslim-brotherhood/

Nesbitt, F. N. (2003). African intellectuals in the belly of the beast: Migration, identity and the politics of African intellectuals in the North. *Critical Arts*, *17*(1–2), 17–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560240385310031

Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment/Assault condemns the attacks on women in Tahrir Square on Friday January 25th, the failure of political groups to secure the square and unprofessional media conduct. (2013, January 29). Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. https://eipr.org/en/press/2013/01/operation-anti-sexual-harassmentassault-condemns-attacks-women-tahrir-square-friday

Peteet, J. (2005). *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps*. University of Pennsylvania Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhtf4

Ragab, N. J., & Katbeh, A. (2018). Syrian Diaspora Groups in Europe: Mapping their Engagement in Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. *Arab Reform Initiative*. https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/syrian-diaspora-groups-in-europe-mapping-their-engagement-in-denmark-france-germany-sweden-switzerland-and-the-united-kingdom/

Raway, G. (2024). Exploring the Capacity of the Egyptian Feminist Movement to Shape Policy Responses to Sexual Violence in Egypt. *Theses and Dissertations*.

https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/2410

Rejali, D. (2009). *Torture and Democracy*. Princeton University Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/267/monograph/book/31124

Said, E. W. (2002). *Reflections on exile and other essays* (1. paperback ed). Harvard Univ. Press.

Said, E. W. (2013). *Out Of Place: A Memoir*. Granta Books.

Salama, M. (2007). Yanko's Footprints: Edward Said and the Experience of Exile. *Pacific Coast Philology, 42*(2), 238–253.

Sami, H. (2015). A Strategic Use of Culture: Egyptian Women's Subversion and Resignification of Gender Norms. In *Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance: Lessons from the Arab World* (9781783602827). Zed Books.

Shalhoub-Kevorkian, N. (2015). *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316159927

Shenhav, Y. A. (2006). *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity*. Stanford University Press.

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Tadros, M. (2016). Understanding Politically Motivated Sexual Assault in Protest Spaces: Evidence from Egypt (March 2011 to June 2013). *Social & Legal Studies*, *25*(1), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663915578187

The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP). (2022, August 11). *Egyptians in Exile: Activism and Organizing Abroad Since 2013* [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vj4QaolHgzM

Wahba, D. (2016). Gendering the Egyptian Revolution. *Women's Movements in Post-"Arab Spring" North Africa*, 61–76.

Winnett, S. (2004). Writing in Place: Edward Said's Constructions of Exile. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, *52*(4), 351–365. https://doi.org/10.1515/zaa.2004.52.4.351

Wintour, P. (2019, November 20). Egyptian exile who sparked protests launches opposition movement. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/20/film-maker-mohamed-ali-who-sparked-egypt-protests-launches-opposition-movement

Yefet, B. (2024). Egypt's diaspora policy in the post-June 2013 era as a transnational mechanism of regime legitimation. *Globalizations*, *21*(4), 612–629. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2023.2239565

Zakarriya, J. (2019). Public Feminism, Female Shame, and Sexual Violence in Modern Egypt. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *20*(7), 113–128.

Zeleza, P. T. (2005). *The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa*. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3821361

Zetter, R. (1991). Labelling Refugees: Forming and Transforming a Bureaucratic Identity. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *4*(1), 39–62. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/4.1.39

Zetter, R. (2007). More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, *20*(2), 172–192. https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem011

Appendices

Egyptian Front for Human Rights
Website: https://egyptianfront.org/
Email: info@egyptianfront.org
Date: 25/07/2022

To the Gender Studies Department at Central European University,

Subject: Permission to Use Interview Material for Academic Research

This letter is to confirm that Rawda Elaskary conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 Egyptian women in exile between 2021 and 2022 as part of her role as a Human Rights Researcher with the Egyptian Front for Human Rights. These interviews were conducted ethically, with informed consent obtained from participants, in accordance with the organization's human rights documentation practices.

We hereby grant Rawda Elaskary permission to use anonymized and ethically collected content from these interviews for the purpose of completing her Master's thesis for the MA Critical Gender Studies at Central European University.

The use of this material is strictly limited to academic research and thesis writing. Any future publication or dissemination beyond the thesis would require further review and explicit approval from the Egyptian Front for Human Rights.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
Ahmed Attalla

Ahmed Attalla
Executive Director
Egyptian Front for Human Rights (EFHR)
Rue d'Arlon 25, Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium
Phone Number: +32465340659
ahmed@egyptianfront.org
https://egyptianfront.org