IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

MASTER THESIS

"THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY": AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF EXILED EGYPTIAN EXPATRIATES IN ISTANBUL

MARIAM DEYAA MOHAMED MAHMOUD AGHA

THESIS SUPERVISOR

ASST. PROF. NURSEM KESKİN AKSAY

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by

MARIAM DEYAA MOHAMED MAHMOUD AGHA

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

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APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

Thesis Jury Members

Title - Name Surname	Opinion	Signature
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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

“GİDENLER”: İSTANBULDA SÜRGÜN EDİLEN MISIRLI GURBETÇİLERİN ETNOGRAFYASI

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Bu etnografik saha çalışması, Mısır’ın 2013 sonrası siyasi güdümlü göç dalgasını inceliyor. 2013 yazında ülkenin askeri olarak ele geçirilmesinden sonra, çok sayıda Mısırlı muhalif devlet baskısı korkusuyla ülkeyi terk etti. Bu etnografide, İstanbul’da yaşayan bir Mısırlı siyasi göçmen olmanın nasıl bir şey olduğunu inceliyorum. “Henüz değil” ile “artık” arasındaki potansiyellere ve umut ile umutsuzluk arasındaki boşluklara bakarak, bu sürgündeki bireylerin fiziksel varlıklarının başka bir yerde olması nedeniyle Mısır’daki siyasi durumla nasıl ilişki kurduklarını anlamaya çalışıyorum. Bu çalışma, birkaç nitel metodolojiyi birleştirerek 2021 ve 2022 yılları arasında gerçekleştirilmiştir. 15 adet yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşme gerçekleştirdim. Röportajlarımı katılımcı gözlem yöntemiyle, sosyal toplantılara katılma, canlı konser ve drama çekim günleri ile birleştirdim. Ayrıca muhataplarımın duygularını anavatanlarına bağlayan tek alan olan dijital ortamda nasıl ifade ettiklerini keşfetmemi sağlayan bir dijital etnografi yöntemini de dahil ettim. Son olarak, Türkiye’de sürgündeki sanatçılar tarafından üretilen dramadaki tekrar eden temaları vurgulamak için bir içerik analizi yöntemi entegre ettim. Derrida’nın hayaletbilim kavramını, Turner’ın eşiklilik teorisini ve Deleuze’ün “kaçış çizgilerini” kullanarak, bu gurbetçilerin sürekli olarak anavatanlarının hatırası ve Arap Baharı’nın gerçekleşmemiş özlemlerinin hayaleti tarafından rahatsız edildiğini savunuyorum. Sanatsal alanda kimileri, ülkeden zorla kaçmanın acısını yeniden yaşarken, bir yandan da gerçekliklerinden kaçmanın ve yeni anlamlar yaratmanın bir yolunu buluyor.

Sırasıyla ve yukarıda bahsedilen üç teori ışığında, nostalji, kararsızlık ve umut olmak üzere üç özel duyguya odaklanıyorum. Bu etnografi, Mısır'ın 2013 sonrası siyasi güdümlü göç dalgası üzerine oldukça kıt olan antropolojik literatüre katkıda bulunuyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Duygulanım, Hauntoloji, Mısır Diasporası, Potansiyel

ABSTRACT

"THE ONES WHO WALK AWAY": AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF EXILED EGYPTIAN EXPATRIATES IN ISTANBUL

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This ethnographic study delves into Egypt's post-2013 politically-motivated migration wave. After the military takeover of the country in the summer of 2013, numerous Egyptian opponents fled the country in fear of the state crackdown. In this study, I delve into the nuances of what it is like to be an Egyptian political migrant living in Istanbul. Looking at the potentialities between the "not yet" and the "no longer" and the spaces between hope and despair, I attempt to explain how these exiled individuals engage with the political situation in Egypt given that their physical presence became elsewhere. This study was carried out between the years 2021 and 2022, combining several qualitative methodologies. I conducted fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews. I merged my interviews with participant observation, attending social gatherings, a live concert, and drama shooting days. I also included a digital ethnographic method, which allowed me to explore how my interlocutors express their emotions in the digital space which is the only space that ties them to their homeland. Lastly, I integrated a content analysis method to highlight the recurrent themes in the drama produced by exiled artists in Turkey. Using Derrida's concept of hauntology (1993), Turner's theory of liminality (1967), and Deleuze's "lines of flight" (1987), I argue that these expatriates are constantly haunted by the memory of their homeland and the specter of the unfulfilled yearnings of the so-called Arab Spring. In the artistic sphere, some of my interlocutors found themselves reliving the pain of forcibly fleeing the country while they also found a way to escape their realities and create new

meanings. Respectively and in light of the three aforementioned theories, I focus on three particular affects, namely nostalgia, ambivalence, and hope. In these ways, this ethnography also adds to the quite-scarce anthropological literature on the Egyptian post-2013 politically-motivated migration wave.

Keywords: Affect, Egyptian diaspora, hauntology, potentiality

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I am exceptionally grateful to my younger sister for always having my back and offering me a great deal of care throughout this endeavor. I am also absolutely thankful to my parents and my brother for their patience with me and their limitless support. I would also like to thank my grandmother for always sending me endless prayers and for my MA Sociology colleagues for making the journey much more pleasurable and bearable.

Finally, I owe so much to my interlocutors who were generous and courageous enough to open up and share bits and pieces of themselves and of their deepest emotions towards subjects often quite sensitive and distressing. I am specifically grateful to Amir and Jamila, two of my interlocutors who found themselves sick on the day of the interview but still chose not to inform me of their sickness, and instead insisted on showing up.

Mariam Agha
ISTANBUL, 2022

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It was in the spring of 2018 when one of my professors assigned us to read Ursula K. Le Guin's short philosophical fiction *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (1973) for an Anthropology of Violence class. Published in 1973, Le Guin's allegory depicts a seemingly utopian city, *Omelas,* in which all residents are living prosperously and happily. Gradually, nonetheless, the reader discovers that the city's prosperousness is essentially built upon the torture and suffering of one single child locked up in a broom closet. The people of *Omelas* also come to comprehend this reality yet only a small portion of them, moved by a strong emotion of guilt, decides to withdraw from the city altogether (Le Guin 1973). Despite its shortness, this allegory features an ever-lasting situation in which individuals grow to recognize numerous spots of injustices born in the larger structures of their life. And in their human instinctual strive for happiness and fulfillment of a good life, individuals respond and act differently towards these many broom closets. Whether they choose to bypass these dark closets or decide to change something about them, we are usually left by a flood of emotions that involve moments of a felt sense of agency and occasions of exhaustive helplessness. In her article "Dilemmas of Political Agency and Sovereignty: The Omelian Allegory", Annabel Herzog offers her reflections on Le Guin's short story, writing "The case of 'Omelas' reveals the hopelessness of change and the ambiguity of resistance against a society believed to be optimal. What can be done against a system like that of Omelas except to leave, and what does leaving mean?" (Herzog 2021, p. 76).

A few months after getting introduced to Le Guin's allegory, I emigrated from Egypt in the summer of 2018 and settled in Istanbul, Turkey. A few weeks following my arrival, after the Eid morning prayer and right in front of the ancient Egyptian obelisk centering the square of the Blue Mosque, I stood rapt in awe of the large number of Egyptian expatriates occupying the space. For the past eight or nine years, numerous individuals had been walking away from their unstable homelands, finding refuge in

Turkey, particularly as a consequence of the events following what is coined as the "Arab Spring" (2011) in several Middle Eastern countries. Turkey has been host to a considerable number of Syrian refugees as well as asylum seekers from different Arab countries. There is also a vividly recognized population of Yemenis and Egyptians who had migrated as a consequence of the political conditions in their homelands. While the literature on the population of Syrians taking refuge in Turkey is vast, other exiled communities are understudied. In this ethnographic fieldwork, I focus on the population of Egyptian political migrants living in Istanbul.

After the military takeover in the summer of 2013, the Egyptian diaspora has been rapidly growing as a consequence of the state crackdown and the expansive political imprisonment campaign targeting various opposing individuals, public figures, and groups affiliated with the January Revolution. *Mada Masr*, an Egyptian independent online newspaper, released a series of articles entitled "New Stories in Exile". In one of these articles, the author delicately wrote that "some exiles enter new lives detached from their past, while others get lost in despair over the countries they were forced to leave. In this series, we speak with those who live in the space between estrangement and nostalgia: those who have built a new life abroad but remain engaged with their former home" (El-Mahdawy 2020). The ones who walk away from Egypt are different from their Omelian counterparts. A good number of them did not choose to leave but were rather forced to. They certainly did not escape a utopia in which all citizens are thrilled and well-off. But what one finds common between the fictional work and this reality is the ghost of their homelands and the memory of the suffering child in the broom closet, personifying a state of ongoing structural violence over which a rapid and radical urban innovation process is taking place.

While Le Guin's fictional piece ends with a scene featuring the departed individuals with the author portraying "they leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back" (Le Guin 1973, p. 6), the reader is left with no account of what happens afterward to those who were left with no choice but to leave. Their new lives and their diverse choices of dealing with the recapture of the locked and tortured child and their choice of leaving are absent from the narrative. In this ethnographic research, I pick up where Le Guin has ended; and I look into the deportees' new lives, their

emotions flooding after leaving, and reflect on what choices were adopted in response to these affects.

My two major research questions are: How do Egyptian political migrants in Istanbul engage with the political situation in Egypt from their situation of exile? What are their emotions towards specters of the past, and how are these emotions affecting their new lives abroad? The post-2013 politically motivated migration wave and the phenomenon of Egyptians being forced to leave the country and not being able to come back is a relatively recent reality. Accordingly, the available literature on this immigration wave is quite scarce.

In the coming paragraphs, I will give an overview of the historical context of this migration wave. The second section will be dedicated to the Egyptian exiles in Turkey with an overview of their new lives abroad. In the third section, I will briefly map out some of the main responses to this exodus in the literature while situating my argument and contribution on the subject in juxtaposition with this literature. Fourthly, I will introduce the reader to the methodology and research design that I used to approach the subject matter. The fifth and final section of this introduction will offer a roadmap and a summary of the different chapters of this ethnographic study.

1.1. Egyptians in Exile

1.1.1. Post-2013 Migration Wave

> On the 15th of August, 2013, one day after the Rabaa massacre, I realized I had no choice but to leave. I received a call from an acquaintance who is closely tied to the regime, informing me that he has an arrest warrant with my name in the drawer and was advising me to flee the country. I was banned from traveling at that time. So, I had to leave illegally through the Sudanese borders.

These words were narrated by Prof. Amin, one of my interlocutors in his late 60s who was a former professor at Cairo University and who was highly active in the political sphere following the January Revolution. Many of my interviewees shared a similar story of having to depart from Egypt in fear of getting detained or right after getting released from imprisonment, fearing being re-arrested. Following the military takeover of the country in the summer of 2013, considerable numbers of Islamists and members

of the Muslim Brotherhood started fleeing the country in fear of the state crackdown (Dunne and Hamzawy 2019). In the following years, they were gradually followed by a number of secular activists and intellectuals who also became targeted by the state due to their earlier affiliations and political involvement in the 2011 uprising. Likewise, individuals who were not active in the political sphere and who were not under threat before traveling but became engaged in any opposing activities abroad avoid visiting Egypt out of fear of getting stopped at Cairo Airport. Two of my interlocutors did not have any legal issues before traveling, but they both participated as actors in drama works that have oppositional themes to the Egyptian state after coming to Turkey. One of them recounted to me that he later knew that the security forces visited his house in Egypt and wanted to arrest him. The other interlocutor also revealed that the Egyptian Embassy in Turkey refused to renew his passport. Now, the two of them cannot risk going back to the country.

1.1.2. Situating the New Wave and Previous Ones

In 2016, the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information which is a non-governmental organization based in Egypt, released a detailed report titled "The third wave of expatriation: About the compulsory migration of Egyptians". In this report, the author describes the post-2013 migration wave as the "Third Exodus", emphasizing that this recent wave was preceded by another two waves of migration in the modern history of Egypt (Hagag 2016). The first wave took place in the 1950s under the reign of president Gamal Abdel Nasser when a large number of members of the Muslim Brotherhood fled the country after being targeted by the regime, facing mass imprisonment, persecution, and torture. A number of wealthy Egyptians also left the country following Nasser's socialist and nationalist policies that turned the properties of some affluent individuals and landowners into public property. The second wave of migration occurred in the 1970s during the rule of Sadat when a large number of Leftists and Nasserites departed from the country. Concurrently, numerous Egyptians preferred migrating to Libya and the Gulf to improve their socioeconomic status following the oil boom.

In the years between 1981 and 2011 under Mubarak's reign, politically motivated expatriation was restricted to small groups of Copts. After the 2011 Revolution, few

business tycoons affiliated with the ousted president left the country together with a growing number of Coptic Christians who preferred leaving in response to the rise of political Islamists to power. After the military coup and particularly following the Rabaa massacre in August 2013, huge numbers of Islamists and members of the Muslim Brothers forcibly fled Egypt followed by an increasing number of liberal and secular activists and intellectuals who gradually became targeted by the state and were compelled to depart too. Hamzawy and Dunne (2019) remark that unlike the previous politically motivated waves of expatriation occurring in the 1950s-70s, this wave is said to be larger in numbers and much more diverse with respect to the identities, ideologies, and age groups of the exiled. The destinations to which expatriates moved were also varied. In the beginning, "Sudan (under the later-ousted Omar al-Bashir), Qatar, Turkey, Malaysia, and some African countries were recipients of the biggest share of this wave of expatriation" (Mandour 2022). Later on, exiled Egyptians also found refuge in other European countries like England and Germany together with the United States and Canada.

1.1.3. 'Political Migrant', 'Refugee', 'Asylum Seeker', or 'Exile'?

While the report mentioned earlier depicts this relatively-recent migration wave as the "Third Exodus", it is pretty challenging to find a convenient description of the Egyptians who left after 2013. They are not legally recognized as refugees or in the collective common sense. Some of them sought asylum while many others did not. In an article published by the Middle East Eye, the authors interview an Egyptian lawyer living in Turkey. Ammar revealed to them that Turkey is merely a temporary protection country; therefore, it is impossible to be granted asylum in it. He added that if someone does apply for asylum in Turkey, they may have to wait up to five years before the UN agency for refugees may relocate them to a nation that will take them in (Smith & Koçak 2021). Besides, calling them 'exiles' might not necessarily encompass all the situation's complexities. In late 19th century Egypt under British colonial rule, exile was a common legal punishment. For instance, Ahmed Urabi, Saad Zaghlul, and other figures of the nationalist movement at that time were sent to exile as disciplinary action for their activism (Dunne & Hamzawy 2019, p.4). The current regime, however, does not formally use exile as a legal punishment against its opponents even though it executes it in an indirect manner. While carrying out

interviews, I used to ask my interlocutors about their feelings toward Istanbul. Only one of my interviewees referred to it using the word ‘exile’. He was in his late 60s, the eldest of all my interlocutors. He depicts:

> Why did I come to Istanbul? Did I choose to? Or, was Istanbul the only refuge I had after being dismissed from the university after the security forces chased after me, and after receiving threats of detention? Istanbul represents an exile for me. And I say 'exile' in the traditional sense of the word like the diaspora poets and the exile phenomenon of the old days (Dr. Amin 68).

Dr. Amin’s insistence to talk about ‘exile’ with reference to a particular phenomenon in the old days or as he emphasized “a traditional sense of the word” is an attempt to highlight not only the absence of choice embedded in the experience but also a set of heavy existential emotions connected to this deportation that might not be recognized today given the normalization of movement and migration.

Younger interlocutors, however, did not use the term exile during the entire interviews even though most of them were forced to leave Egypt and all of them cannot return to it. Their emotions towards Istanbul were largely oriented by their personal experiences in it, not by the reasons behind their moving to it. Many of my younger interviewees in their 20s expressed positive emotions towards the hosting city, emphasizing particularly the immense diversity they found and which helped them find themselves. Others carried gloomy emotions towards the metropolis which they found very exhausting and in which they had to struggle on their own to survive and make a living. Amir, for instance, described “Turkey is God's heaven on earth, and Istanbul is its hell. I had a billboard over which I wrote: Istanbul is our story. Istanbul is our heartache. Istanbul is God’s test” (Amir 27).

According to Sznajder and Roniger, exile is a mechanism of institutional exclusion, not the only one, whereby a person engaged in politics and public life, or perceived to be so by those in positions of power, is forced or pressed to leave his or her home country or place of residence, unable to return until a change in political circumstances occurs (Sznajder and Roniger 2009, p:11). Likewise, Forsdyke limits the definition of exile to encompass only “those who were compelled by force or fear to leave their homelands, since these cases seem most bound up in the political development of the polis” (Forsdyke 2005, p: 9). In a similar vein, Marrus emphasizes that exiles are

"individuals who left their native country for political reasons, usually after having engaged in revolutionary activity" (Marrus 1985, p.9). Therefore, going back to my interlocutor's questions "Why did I come to Istanbul? Did I choose to?", the absence of choice becomes a core condition for exile. Most of my interlocutors did not have the choice to leave. Some of them were clearly threatened and advised to depart while others did not want to run the potential risk of getting detained.

For this reason, I was quite reluctant to use the term 'exile' many times while referring to my interviewees. As I was not sure if they would identify with it and describe themselves as such or not. "Political migrant" might be another possible depiction that is closer to the present state of affairs. Still, the term might imply a sense of choice or preference. A political migrant is someone who emigrated primarily due to dissatisfaction with the political conditions in his or her country. Nonetheless, the phrase does not necessarily demonstrate the fact that it was a forced migration most of the time. In the previously mentioned report, Hagag uses the term "involuntary departure", and perhaps that is the closest portrayal available of the phenomenon (Hagag 2016).

El Ghorba was the word I mostly came across during my fieldwork and while carrying out digital ethnographic research. For instance, I came across social events and assemblages under the name of "our gathering in *El Ghorba*". Likewise, two of my interlocutors identified themselves using the word *Ghareeb*, stranger. Correspondingly, the theme of estrangement and alienation again appeared several times in the content and titles of some of the drama works I came across that were produced by Egyptian migrants in Turkey. The word *Ghorba* could translate into alienation, estrangement, expatriation, or foreignness. The term depicts not only a circumstance but also an emotional state. El Khachab writes "…the Arabic root *Gharaba*, echoing those of de and reterritorialization: on the one hand, *Ghorba* is constant nomadic movement, that is, exile, estrangement, and even alienation; on the other hand, *Ghareeb* is a stranger, at the end of a deterritorialization flux, settling down (El Khachab 2010, p.99).

Yet again, my choice to refer to my interlocutors using the term exile is not only about a desire to emphasize the absence of choice, but also an attempt to highlight several

features of this condition, namely retrospection, the regular disjuncture with spatiality and temporality as well as a process of negation and reinvention. In his piece "The Condition We Call Exile", Joseph Brodsky highlights that exile goes beyond a legal status or a migratory experience. Exile, in his perspective, is an existential as well as a psychological condition and one of its major features is retrospection. Brodsky writes "...a writer in exile is, by and large, a retrospective and retroactive being. In other words, retrospection plays an excessive…role in his existence, overshadowing his reality and dimming the future into something thicker than its usual pea soup" (Brodsky 1991, p. 103). Retrospection, the presence as well as the interference of the past in my interlocutors' new lives abroad are major aspects of this exilic condition which I will be tackling in the first chapter of this thesis.

In her chapter "On the Paradigms of Banishment, Displacement, and Free Choice", Yana Meerzon highlights that the word exile does not truly have a place in legal jargon. It is not included in Castles' paper, which explains the laws governing international migration, nor is it referenced in the Human Rights or Refugee Conventions. Accordingly, Meerzon argues that the absence of the word from the legal terminology indicates further its metaphoric and emotional connotations (Meerzon 2017). The author illustrates that the word exile conjures up images of agony, silence, the inability of resolving disputes, and the lack of any form of closure for an individual or a group (Meerzon 2017). The lack of closure was a recurrent theme in many of the interviews I carried out. It usually appeared in the form of my interlocutors emphasizing how they spend years in a temporary stage, believing that the political situation will soon be resolved and they shall be able to go back to their homeland. Meerzon writes "Exile encourages retrospection: the gaze of an exilic artist is simultaneously turned into one's past and one's future" (Meerzon 2017, p. 19). This dualistic gaze that looks back and forth concurrently and that is regularly stuck somewhere in between creates a sense of liminality which I will be addressing in the second chapter and which is intrinsic to the condition of political exile.

Darko Suvin distinguishes between political exiles, who are driven from their homelands for ideological reasons, émigrés, who are individuals or families who fled their countries due to economic reasons, refugees, who are a sizable population driven to flee in vast numbers as a result of conflict, war, or other persecutions, and

expatriates, who are nomads who live in the anticipation of returning to their home countries as soon as economic or political conditions are favorable (Suvin 2011). In this ethnography, I mostly use the term "expatriate" as it features emotions of alienation that so many of my interviewees expressed. I also use the word "exile" to remind the reader of the reality of a compulsory departure that did not include an element of choice.

1.2. Egyptian Expatriates in Turkey

On July 3, 2013 and following street protests, the army toppled the former first democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi and suspended the constitution. Subsequently, the state banned the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), completely prohibiting the Muslim Brotherhood from participating in all forms of national politics and declaring it a terrorist organization (BBC News, 2014). Massive arrest campaigns, street violence, and mass murder started taking place in the months after, targeting senior leaders and members of the Muslim Brotherhood together with variant opponents of the new regime. In consequence, the Turkish regime instantly showed sympathy and support, condemning the military coup. Correspondingly, this vivid supportive stance together with the Islamic orientation of the Turkish leadership made Turkey a favored destination to many Islamists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had to flee the country. "According to senior Turkish officials who were quoted in the media in 2019 and 2020, some 15–30,000 Egyptians are living in Turkey" (Ayyash 2022). Comparing the number of Egyptians who left Egypt for economic reasons to those who fled as political migrants, it is quite hard to get accurate figures. There is some quantitative and anecdotal evidence of large increases in emigration following 2013. Using qualitative data, Hamzawy and Dunne concluded that there has been a significant trend in "politically motivated immigration" in Egypt since 2013 (Dunne and Hamzawy 2019). Still, many individuals prefer not to disclose that they were forced to leave the country due to security reasons which make it challenging to reach any conclusive data on the actual numbers of Egyptian exiles in general and exiled Egyptians in Turkey in particular. Upon arrival in Turkey, figures closely affiliated with the Turkish regime were regularly supporting the Egyptian expatriates. Widespread rallies in favor of the expatriates were carried out by the AKP, condemning the coup and the state repression following it" (Magued 2018, p. 488).

The Turkish support for Egyptian exiles was also quite recognizable during the fieldwork. In most of the site visits I carried out, there was always more than one Turkish AKP representative present and delivering supportive speeches. During the *iftar* held by the Egyptian Student Union in Turkey, for instance, the organizers started the evening by playing the Egyptian national anthem followed by the Turkish one as a gesture of respect to the Turkish guests joining the gathering.

This sympathizing atmosphere allowed expatriates to continue with their activism and opposition from exile. This transnational activism took diverse forms, the initial and most common of which was the expatriates' investment in the media sphere and in creating coalitions. Expats with legal support from Turkey were able to launch five twenty-four-hour TV channels with an anti-regime oppositional narrative, namely Mekameleen, Misr Alan, Al Sharq, Rabaa', and Watan. These stations, which are broadcasted from Istanbul and viewed in Egypt, served as a bridge between the political migrants and their home country. Consequently, these satellite channels also became an occupational lump for many Egyptian expatriates living in Istanbul. Some of my interlocutors who were previously working in these channels explained that these stations were a source of attraction to many of the Egyptian expatriates, particularly younger individuals upon arrival largely because they served as a vocational ghetto that is quite familiar and does not require knowledge of the Turkish language and culture. Several of my interviewees also clarified that at the beginning these channels used to offer high salaries and training opportunities to non-professionals which also attracted many expatriates to work there. Over time, this earlier investment in the field of the media by the opposition abroad through the establishment of TV channels led to a growing community of young Egyptian artists and media technicians. Some of my interlocutors remarked that there is an increasing number of young expatriates who are becoming interested in various artistic and media production spheres largely because of their previous work in these channels. Besides the media field, many Egyptian expatriates entered the world of commerce, whether by starting businesses that focused on administrative activities for foreigners or establishing companies related to tourism, or businesses in the real estate and building sectors.

In response to Turkey’s patronage of the Muslim Brotherhood in its opposition to the regime, the Egyptian media began a campaign of negative publicity against Turkey. Some Egyptian journalists called for a boycott of Turkish goods and soap operas. Later, Egypt expelled the Turkish ambassador from Cairo due to the rising hostilities and downgraded diplomatic ties to a status of chargé d’affaires. Nonetheless, in 2022, Turkey showed intentions to reconcile and normalize its diplomatic relationship with Egypt. According to Turkish officials, Turkey has decided to designate a new ambassador to Cairo to fill the diplomatic post that has been vacant since 2013 (Soylu 2022). Additionally, the Turkish Minister of Treasury and Finance Nureddin Nebati visited Egypt last June to join the Annual Meetings of the Islamic Development Bank Group, 2022, which was hosted by Egypt. This was the first visit by a Turkish minister to Cairo in roughly nine years. In this process of attempting to restore full diplomatic ties between the two countries, one of the major Egyptian opposition TV channels, Mekameleen, recently announced that it is closing its headquarters in Turkey and will continue broadcasting from elsewhere (Abu Sneineh and Shalaby 2022).

As previously noted, senior officials from the foreign ministries of Egypt and Turkey met multiple times in Cairo and Ankara to discuss the possibility of holding high-level reconciliation discussions in the summer of 2021. However, the conversation ceased. While Cairo was cited by Ankara as the cause of the poor progress, the Egyptian side blamed Ankara, saying the impasse was brought on by the way Turkey continued to handle several issues, most notably Libya and the eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish government's efforts to mend relations with Egypt are partially driven by the country's deteriorating economic situation, which led Erdogan to consider the possibility of mending fences with Egypt and other neighbors in order to resolve his nation's maritime border disputes. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan were photographed shaking hands and grinning on the sidelines of the FIFA World Cup opening ceremony in Qatar on November 20. The image has since gained widespread attention on social media. Doha, which wanted to expedite the slow-moving reconciliation talks that began more than a year ago, mediated two months of conversations that resulted in the meeting of the two formerly hostile state leaders (Tharwat and Soliman 2022).

The tension did not only appear in the diplomatic rupture of the Turkish-Egyptian relations following the military takeover but tensions also developed between the Egyptian embassy in Turkey and the political migrants living here. Many Egyptian expatriates living in Turkey are not provided with consular services by the embassy. Many of them face obstacles in obtaining official documents like birth certificates for their newly born infants or passport renewals. This is mainly because of the embassy's full awareness that many of the Egyptians living in Turkey are dissidents. One of my interlocutors revealed that he can no longer renew his Egyptian passport, for the embassy instantly rejected his renewal request. Thus, he cannot travel anywhere and his legal status is quite precarious. Around 33,000 Egyptians are now residing in Turkey as mentioned earlier, with about 3,000 of them having humanitarian visas; these visas are often granted to those who have departed the country for political reasons (Smith and Koçak, 2021). During one of my site visits during fieldwork, one of the older actors took his wallet out of his pocket with a victorious look to show me his Turkish identity card while emphasizing that he had finally acquired Turkish citizenship. Applying for Turkish citizenship has been the pursuit of many expatriates who have their national passport on the edge of expiring and cannot renew it due to their earlier or current political engagements.

While we were conversing, one of my interviewees recalled that day when he received a phone call from one of his close friends in Egypt. Nader recounted that amidst the call his friend asked him, "Have you become one of them? He posed the question and I could already glimpse the judgment in his tone. I find myself wondering, are the people there perceiving me that way?". Nader illustrated that his friend was subtly wondering if he had become a member of the Muslim Brotherhood due to his move to Turkey and his participation in anti-regime drama works. Months before the coup, the Egyptian media started a wide campaign of defamation against members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Media portrayals of the Muslim Brothers usually carried accusations of betrayal, terrorism, hypocrisy, and acting to serve personal interests and foreign agendas. After 2013 and with the escalation in the numbers of Egyptians fleeing the country, the Egyptian media started to portray Egyptians departing to Turkey in particular as members of the Muslim Brotherhood, fugitives, and traitors to the homeland. While attending a social gathering carried out by the Egyptian Student Union in Turkey, a young university student asked the union's president if the union

is facing any bureaucratic or political issues in its official establishment, registration, and intercommunication with the Egyptian embassy in Turkey. With a humorous tone, the president replied, to him saying "The union is an independent entity. But you already know that if you are an "Egyptian in Turkey", this inescapably comes with a handful of stereotypes that causes you issues".

The effect of the Egyptian media portrayal of the Egyptians in Turkey on the individuals living here appeared in other interviews as well. My interlocutor, Ahmad, for instance, recounted that he had to act in a romantic musical video clip that involved scenes that were discordant with his values and preferences. He illustrated, however, that he got motivated to film it so that upon its release, his friends, family members, and acquaintances in Egypt can stop affiliating him with the Muslim Brothers just because he is living in Turkey. Likewise, Prof. Amin complained that it is not only the Egyptian media and Egyptians influenced by it that stereotype and judge migrants in Turkey as being Muslim Brothers, but the Turkish host does the same thing. He illustrated that most of the Egyptians who fled to Turkey in 2013 were affiliated with the Muslim Brothers. However, nine years have already passed and now the demographic map of Egyptian expatriates in Turkey had already changed according to him. He clarified that the community had become much more ideologically diverse; nonetheless, the Turkish host together with the supporting AKP representatives still treat the Egyptian migrants as a homogeneous group.

1.3. Post-2013 Exodus in the Literature

As I have previously mentioned, the last wave of expatriation and involuntary departure in Egypt is comparably new. For this reason, the academic literature available on the subject matter is also proportionally limited. Michele Dunne and Amr Hamzawy were among the first to write on that wave (Dunne and Hamzawy 2019). Their contribution, however, is mainly descriptive as they try to contextualize and map out the different features of this migration wave. They look at the reasons behind that wave while situating it within previous ones. They also briefly tackle the effects of that wave on Egypt and the Egyptian government's response to exiled activism. David McKeever also contributes to the literature on the relatively recent post-2013 migration wave, offering a more analytical account. His ethnographic research looks

into exiled activism with a particular focus on Egyptian activists who are exiled in England. Using a contentious political perspective, McKeever compares the activism in Egypt with that in exile. Besides, he mainly tackles issues of decertification and brokerage, arguing that there is an internalized culture of suspicion that endures even outside the borders of Egypt and which negatively affects the political participation of exiles. For instance, McKeever addresses how exiles are skeptical of the embassy's surveillance of the diaspora. He also illustrates how the fear of getting harassed in the airport upon visiting one's family in Egypt or the fear of having any family member residing in Egypt getting harmed as a result of abroad activism hinder many expatriates from participating in anti-regime initiatives from abroad (McKeever 2019, 2020).

May Telmissany also works on the Egyptian diaspora, focusing on exiled intellectuals and artists. The author introduces the notion of nomadic citizenship, illustrating that the exiles are gradually transforming conventional understandings of citizenship and belonging through their overseas and virtual activism (Telmissany 2021). In a similar vein, Mostafa Hussin tackles how Egyptian exiles reconstruct the meaning of nationalism by creating their own version of patriotism abroad. His ethnographic fieldwork delves into the nuances of the everyday lives of Egyptian expatriates in Berlin and Paris. Hussin also briefly tackles issues of decertification which McKeever brings up, arguing that the Egyptian regime uses passports and citizenship as a tool to subvert any possible activism (Hussin 2020). When looking for literature focusing on the Egyptian post-2013 exiles in Turkey, I could only find the work of Shaimaa Magued. Magued's fieldwork investigates transnational media advocacy by interviewing exiled Egyptian TV presenters who live in Istanbul and work in anti-regime channels broadcasting from Turkey. The author's core argumentation is that the establishment of these opposing transnational channels marks a newfangled alteration in the tactics Islamists in general and the Muslim Brothers in particular employ when it comes to their imagination of political participation and action (Magued 2018). Most of the literature written on the post-2013 exodus is much concerned with transnational political activism and the activists among the exiled. In this ethnography, I try to also incorporate expatriates who are less engaged in transborder opposing activism and who are not necessarily identified as political figures or activists. Additionally, this research endeavor primarily focuses on emotions associated with past memories of political involvement, involuntary departure, and the

migratory experience. Besides, I delve into the role these emotions play in the deconstruction and redefining of the exiles' subjectivities. These aspects are still understudied in the available academic literature. In an interview with Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze refers to Charles Péguy's philosophical work *Clio* (1931), highlighting that Péguy remarks that:

> There are two ways of considering events, one being to follow the course of the event, gathering how it comes about historically, how it's prepared and then decomposes in history, while the other way is to go back into the event, to take one's place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities (Deleuze 1990).

This ethnography aims to add an unexplored aspect of expatriation to the quite scarce and recent academic literature on the Egyptian 'third exodus' or the 'post-2013 politically motivated migration wave'. Furthermore, it adds to the literature on the long-term effects of the "Arab Spring" on the individuals who have taken part in it. In other words, following Deleuze, this ethnographic study also explores how exiled individuals grow both young and old in the political series of events following the 2011 uprising.

1.4. Methodology

1.4.1. Immersed In: An Insider Outsider

Around a year before I began this fieldwork journey, I was invited to an at-home dinner in the neighborhood of Güneşli, Istanbul which is among the areas known to be inhabited by many Egyptian expatriates. Almost all the invited people were former activists or people highly engaged in the political public sphere in Egypt before they were left with no choice but to flee the country. What was quite intriguing for me was how following the dinner, the whole discussion was around past political events they took part in before their departure. It was quite stimulating to see how shreds of the past were hovering around and dominating the entire evening. Deep down, I felt an urge to document the endless unraveled stories. While most of the men in the gathering were thoroughly keen to share different anecdotes with vivid excitement, the woman hosting us seemed to be indifferent and quite disinterested in the conversation. She sat in expressionless silence for most of the evening, withdrawing to wash the dishes from

time to time. One of the invitees recognized her incurious facial expression, humorously commenting on her blatant boredom with the conversation. She responded that she can no longer see any value in recalling and reflecting on the past when there seems to be no clear vision for the future. Her point resonated with past conversations I have encountered. Ever since I came to Turkey in 2018 and became an Egyptian expatriate myself, I have always encountered similar conversations in most of the social gatherings I attended. Between a vividly-present past and a desire to move past it, I found myself already immersed in the field way before considering it for ethnographic studying. In this sense, this ethnography is "anthropology at home" par excellence (Williams 2011).

Esther R. Anderson shares her reflections on conducting research in a familiar site or what she refers to as writing a "hometown ethnography". Anderson (2021) brings up the history of the field, and how the discipline of anthropology was initially about studying the distant and different 'other'. For a long time, it has been assumed that the strangeness of the field equates to or guarantees a stronger sense of objectivity and validity (Anderson 2021, 213). Anderson argues against this assumption, problematizing the rigid insider/outsider dichotomy and emphasizing the shifting positionality of the researcher inside any field. She clarifies:

> The characterization of ethnography at home as "insider anthropology" forgets and obfuscates the unstable relationships of power and uncertainty that can be present in any type of fieldwork, and ignores that researcher identity is also informed by gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, class, and a host of other factors. The insider-outsider dichotomy misrepresents the true reality of a shifting researcher positionality experienced throughout different contexts during research … or what aspects of identity might be emphasized or minimized in any given fieldwork moment (Anderson 2021, p. 214).

While doing my fieldwork, Anderson's line of thinking was quite relevant and convincing at every step. At the beginning and while scheduling pilot interviews, I was not planning to narrow my topic to Egyptian expatriates solely. I remember attending two seminars carried out as part of the annual Istanbul Arabic Book Fair. A well-known Egyptian political science academician delivered the first one titled "Research Centers' Identity and Their Role in Awareness and Political Change" while a Syrian female novelist lectured the second. Following the seminars, I reached out to both of them to request an interview. The Egyptian academician immediately and smoothly welcomed the invitation. The Syrian novelist was also willing to be interviewed, but I

could glimpse in her eyes a gaze that was full of questions and skepticism. My Egyptian identity most of the time allowed me quite easy access to the field. A sense of trust, comfort, and openness was smoothly earned in most of the interviews I carried out.

Nonetheless, I was not always capable of maintaining an insider positionality. When I wanted to interview artists and join them while they were filming a drama work, I deeply felt that my positionality was shifted to an outsider and I needed a mediator. I reached out to Jamal, a senior actor who had a charismatic and sociable character, so that he can be that mediator. When I arrived at the filming site, I introduced myself to Jamal who was quite welcoming but was also so keen to categorize me. In the beginning, he directly asked if I was affiliated with the Muslim Brothers; I answered that I was not. I wanted to break the ice so I brought up a picture of my father and tried to remind him that he met with my father before. He instantly recalled him, and this allowed for a deeper sense of assurance and receptivity. Throughout the day, he kept capturing photos and videos from the filmed scenes and sending them to me so that I can use them in my research. Despite the Egyptian identity that allowed me to be an insider to the field most of the time, my gender and professional identity as a female researcher oddly present in the male-dominated space of artists created a distance that was only mediated through Jamal's significant facilitation and the social capital he already possessed within that community. While I was receiving numerous welcoming gestures from participants in the space like a senior actor reaching out and wishing I had arrived earlier to see the master scene which they had just finished, I was also receiving investigative looks not fully understanding what I was exactly doing in the place which constantly reminded me of my dual positionality as both an insider and outsider.

1.4.2. Snowball Sampling

Jamal was not the only mediator on that day. Upon my arrival at the filming location, I accidentally met Nader, a thirty-year-old actor whom I interviewed earlier. While talking, he asked if I was still proceeding with the series of interviews. He then stopped one of his colleagues who works as an art director, introduced him to me, and vigorously suggested that I have to interview him as well, as he believes he has a lot

of meaningful stories to share. That was not the first time I received an interview recommendation. Most of the time, I asked my interlocutors to suggest names they think are convenient for interviewing. Sometimes, they did that naturally without me asking. I mainly relied on the snowballing method while selecting my interviewees, because I was seeking a variant and spontaneous segment. I carried out fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with Egyptian expatriates living in Istanbul aged between twenty to sixty. Eight of my interlocutors were men while the other seven were women. The balance between both genders and the choice of a wide sample when it comes to age is purposeful, as it can allow for a juxtaposition between different generations and genders when it comes to emotions of expatriation. Almost all of the interviews were audio-recorded after taking the permission of my interviewees except for one interview with a young Egyptian researcher who was not so comfortable with recording due to the political and sensible nature of the topic. He was partly known in Egypt and experienced imprisonment before his departure. It is significant to remark that he was the only interlocutor who newly arrived in Turkey. All of these elements might have contributed to his unease with the idea of recording. For that interview only, I relied solely on my field notes.

All of my interlocutors are political migrants that left Egypt primarily because of their discomfort with the political status quo while most of them were forced to depart when they realized that their freedom and safety were at risk. One of my interviewees asked me to send him the interview questions beforehand, illustrating that his father has legal problems in Egypt, and he did not want to put him at any further risk. Once I fulfilled his request, he accepted the interview request afterward. Respecting confidentiality and protecting my interlocutors' privacy was a priority for me. Therefore, all the names have been changed and replaced with nicknames and a depiction that does not expose the identity of the interviewee. Almost all of my interlocutors were people who did not know me before. This choice was intentional. The fact that they did not know me previously allowed them more space to express themselves, as they knew almost nothing about my personal stances on the questions. However, I made sure I reached out to them through mutual close friends which gave them a strong sense of trust and assurance and allowed them to open up. All interviews were held in Arabic and faithfully transcribed and translated into English.

1.4.3. ‘Affective Attunement’: In-depth Semi-Structured Interviews

The in-depth interviews I carried out were mostly semi-structured and designed to last for an average of two to three hours to allow my interlocutors a space to tell their stories. Taking into account Kate G. Willink and Salma T. Shukri’s reflections on the notion of “affective attunement” in interviews, I made sure that I did not carry out more than one interview a day. Affective attunement, as the authors emphasize, is about sustaining a high level of attention not only to the stories being told but also to the embodied and sensual experience in an interview (Willink and Shukri 2018). The writers clarify:

> An interview from our perspective is not a scripted exchange, a traditional dialogue, a performance of two self-contained subjects, or a verbatim transcript. Additionally, it is not something to be cut up, thematized, or made into a collection of words on the page. Instead, interviews are intra-actional, errant, and generative. They are relational events that are shaped by the people, objects, atmosphere, and affective tonalities (Willink and Shukri 2018, p. 203).

Coming across these words before conducting interviews allowed me to leave room for improvisation, permitting a chance for my interviewees to go with their own flow with minimal interference. I also took into account Shouse’s assertion that “affect cannot be fully realized in language” (Leys 2011, p.442). Accordingly, some of the interview questions were designed to grant my participants a space to integrate other forms of expression when depicting their emotions like playing a musical composition and reflecting on it or referring to a painting, visual, etc.

1.4.4. Digital Ethnography

Sensationalist virtual media could hardly be overlooked in this study as the Egyptian public sphere is mostly reachable to my interlocutors through the virtual space. Most of my interviewees could not go back to Egypt, so the digital sphere was the only nexus between them and their homeland. Therefore, observing my interlocutors’ activity and content over social media worked as a useful complementary method to the interviews. In many of the interviews, I asked my interlocutors to unpack and elaborate on some of the content they had shared over their social media. This helped quite a lot in deepening the conversation. There was also a question directed mostly to younger interviewees relating to how they define themselves on their biography sections over

their social media accounts. In most of the interviews, this question allowed deeper insights into how they construct their subjectivities in relation to their emotions and expanded the space for further elaborations. Dhiraj Murthy (2008) writes:

> Ethnography is about telling social stories. When an ethnographer comes back from 'the field', they, like Walter Benjamin's (1969: 84) 'storyteller', have 'something to tell about'. With the introduction of new technologies, the stories have remained vivid, but the ways they were told have changed (Murthy 2008, p. 838).

Furthermore, Murthy clarifies that the definition of space has evolved beyond the physical to encompass more than just the gathering of individuals in one location (Murthy 2008). Relying primarily on physical space, face-to-face in-depth interviews, and in-person observation from site visits was quite valuable and allowed me most of the time to get a grip on minute details of facial expressions, voice tones, body language, and other elements that could only be understood when physically encountered. However, integrating digital platforms as complementary sites of observation was also a quite useful toolkit. This is because many of my interlocutors were regular users of different social media platforms and a lot of them routinely expressed their emotions more authentically in these spheres. For the site visits as well, there was most of the time coverage of these gatherings and events over the digital space whether by the participants or by organizers that were significant to look at to understand how people taking part in these events engage and comment on their experiences over there virtually.

In her book *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied, and Everyday*, Christine Hine argues that we must broaden the scope of ethnographic research to include contexts where social interactions are electronically mediated, not simply face-to-face if they are no longer purely co-located in time and location (Hine 2015). Piia Varis (2016) defines digital ethnography as an exploration "on online practices and communications, and on offline practices shaped by digitalization" (Varis 2016, p. 57). Jennifer Cleland and Anna MacLeod (2021) highlight that both ethnography and digital ethnography share the same purpose, namely to give comprehensive and in-depth depictions of everyday life and interactions (Cleland and MacLeod 2021, p. 878). The authors also highlight the significance of limiting and defining exactly which digital content will the researcher choose to engage with and for what reasons and

purposes (Cleland and MacLeod 2021, p. 881). Due to the barrage of virtual content related to my research topic, I chose to restrict myself only to two digital social media platforms, namely Facebook and Instagram. Besides, I focused primarily on social media content shared by my interlocutors together with virtual content of people who took part in the events I attended as a participant observant in response to their engagement in these gatherings and events. This choice was made purposefully to keep both the physical and the virtual observations in close proximity and ensure that the field notes from each complement one another.

1.4.5. Limitations

An inadequate sample size is the first of this study's shortcomings. Due to time restrictions, I was only able to conduct fifteen in-depth semi-structured interviews, which overall resulted in a relatively small sample size. More interviews would provide more comprehensive insights into the situation. Secondly, it was more difficult to delve into the topic, review, and engage with a broad body of literature due to the inadequacies of earlier research on the post-2013 politically driven migration wave. On the expanding Egyptian diaspora over the past ten years in general and on the expanding Egyptian communities in Turkey that have migrated primarily as a result of political circumstances in particular, there is very little academic literature available in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Thirdly, having an insider's viewpoint and positionality as a researcher gave me easy access to the community I'm working with. However, maintaining an emotional distance from the subject I'm working on during the process was also quite difficult for me many times.

Fourthly, because four of my interviewees were part of two overlapping exodus waves, it was important for me to contextually and historically place the post-2013 wave in connection to the previous waves that came before it in Egypt's recent history. For instance, long before the 2011 revolution, their parents' economic relocation caused Anas, Hassan, Jamila, and Nada to be born and raised overseas. Although they stayed in Egypt for a few years following the revolution and usually spent the summer there with their extended families, they were once again forced to leave the country in 2013 and have been unable to return again due to their political involvement in the uprisings. Individuals of what I depict as the "double exodus" need to be separated from those

who were born and reared in the nation because they shared slightly different emotions. I did not go into great depth about this since I was more interested in the feelings that both groups had in common. However, keeping this distinction in mind would be beneficial for future research since it would enable illuminating comparisons.

1.5. Thesis Roadmap

Around a year ago, an anonymous collective published a book featuring a collected selection of political activist Alaa Abd El-Fattah's writings, interviews, and social media posts translated into English from the period between 2011 to 2021. Abd El-Fattah is a forty-year-old Egyptian software developer, a figure who has become deeply associated with the January Revolution. The book recounts Abd El-Fattah's thoughts and contemplations throughout the whole decade following the uprising (El-Fattah 2022). Abd El-Fattah is currently a political prisoner enduring a hunger strike, having spent most of the years after 2011 in jail. In one of the reviews written on the book, Rachel Aspden writes:

> As the public and private tragedies mount up, cracks appear in his usual eloquence and certainty: he describes his sadness at leaving [his son] to meet his nightly probation curfew; his fears that imprisonment will leave him permanently unemployable; his struggle, in a succession of lonely, decrepit cells, with despair (Aspden 2021).

Despite a condition of impairment, prolonged captivation, and an unfulfilled dream, the releasers of the book interestingly decided to title it *You Have Not Yet Been Defeated* (2021). The title's choice implies a glance of hope and a remark that is primarily directed to a future that is yet to come. However, when I checked the Arabic version of the book that was released a few months ago, I realized that the title was completely different. This time, the Arabic title was chosen to be *The Spring's Ghost* (2021) which leaves the reader with an entirely different impression. The ghost represents a deceased living and an absently present figure that deforms and complicates the linearity of time and the rigid lines between the past, the present, and the future. While the "ghost" exhibits haunting, enduring memories, and nostalgia, the "not yet" exemplifies hope. In this ethnography I follow the same stream, starting with hauntology and ending with hope while investigating the condition of liminality that connects both.

In the first chapter, I will investigate the presence of absences in all of its nuances and manifestations in light of Derrida's concept of "hauntology" (1993). The definition of hauntology, its many connotations, and its applications to this research will be covered in the first section. I argue that the ghost of the Arab Spring's unrealized aspirations and remembrance of events that came before many of my interviewees' departure haunt them constantly. While exile is in essence a physical separation of the subject from the Egyptian public space, I argue that there are three additional spheres—specifically, parts of the urban landscape in Istanbul, the digital, and the artistic spaces—that frequently aroused phantoms of the past and connected the expatriates back to Egypt. Some of them relived past memories preceding their leave from the country again while also discovering a means of escaping their reality and generating new meanings. In the second section, I will concentrate on the sentiment of nostalgia and show how it manifested itself in various contexts. In the fieldwork, nostalgia was most often associated with pain and potentiality rather than a romanticized view of Egypt or the revolution. In the third and last section, I will be examining the impact of guilt and its connection to hauntology.

In the second chapter, I venture into the territories bridging between the past and the future. I examine the feelings of ambivalence that my interlocutors experience in light of Victor Turner's notion of liminality (1967) and Árpád Szakolczai's reworking of the concept (2017). I shall investigate the concept's origins in the first section and how it relates to the emotions and narratives of my interlocutors. In the second section, I'll look into ambivalent and liminal feelings as they relate to the creation of new subjectivities overseas. In the third and last part, I will go into the feelings of suspicion, distrust, and mistrust that many of my interlocutors have for those who are leading the majority of the opposing activities that are being held from exile.

In the third and final chapter, I delve into the areas where hope dwells and thrives. The geographical potentialities related to exile in general and Turkey, in particular, are further discussed in the first section. Subjectivity, becoming, and self-making as potential domains are the main topics of the second section. In the third and final part, I address the shift in interest and perception that many of my interviewees had previously indicated when they remodeled their pursuits from a macro-level conception of action to a more microscopic, small-scale vision of it.

CHAPTER II

THE PRESENCE OF AN ABSENCE

Illustration 2.1. Official Poster of the Movie Absent (2021)

2.1. Introduction

A year ago, a collective of Egyptian artists residing in Istanbul produced a cinematic eighty-minute film titled *Absent* (Aboulftoh, 2021, as seen in figure 1 above). The artistic narrative traces the story of a young Egyptian activist, Hossam, who had entered into a deep coma after getting shot during the November 2011 scuffles between the security forces and the demonstrators at Mohammed Mahmoud street in downtown Cairo under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) transitory rule, following the ouster of Mubarak. The protagonist went in a coma for eight years, a medical condition that deprived him of witnessing all the escalations and political transformations that happened after that moment. When the main character got injured and lost consciousness, he was surrounded by a group of close friends who were also revolutionary. The film recounts how each one of them had changed over time, highlighting how the rapid unfolding of political transitions reshaped their subjectivities, stances, and orientations. Concurrently, the story features Hossam's nurse who finds his diary early on and starts reading out loud excerpts from it

throughout the film. Using simple, clear, and genuine words, Hossam scribbled down his thoughts on his participation in the uprising and his sentiments towards the events. At the end of the film, he wakes up from his prolonged syncope and manages to escape from the security forces that demanded his arrest fleeing the country. What sets apart Hossam from his friends is that he was the "Absent", the one who never attended any of the junctures following 2011. He had never changed nor was he given a chance to become. After the release of the film, one of the Egyptian anti-regime channels in Turkey hosted the crew behind the movie. During the TV show, the young actor who performed the role of Hossam commented on the character he played, saying:

> Hossam is none of us. For him, time stopped at the last moment that was genuinely pure and pleasant. The last memory he carries is a flashback of a people all united under one cause in a moment in time when everything was as clear as crystal. At some point, we've all been that person (Mekameleen TV, 2021).

The TV presenter who is also an exile in his 50s interrupted him with another question, so he did not elaborate further. Later on, we sat for an interview and I had the chance to ask him to explain what he meant. He illustrated "If I were in Hosaam's shoes, I would have lost my mind. Can you recognize the difference in the emotions between the Revolution and now?! I would have experienced this profound difference in a spur of a moment instead of ten years" (Ahmad, 30). He then gave me another reason why he believes that Hossam is none of us. Hossam never turned into a numb person unlike many of us as he continues to explain. The young actor discloses that he can hardly feel anything when he gets informed that someone was unjustly imprisoned or executed which was not the case when it all started.

Colored in a military green, dusky tone, the film's poster features a vacant wheelchair that stands alone in a dark depot covered by a thick ray of sunlight mingled with mist penetrating from the exit. The poster's design reiterates the core theme of the movie presented in its title which is absence. This absence might refer to the activist that ended up fleeing the country after a lengthened period of suffering. It can also symbolize Hossam's subjectivity that is no longer present as the main actor interprets. Hossam also personifies the imaginary stereotype of the January revolutionary figure who is often envisioned as an ideologically neutral youngster. He can also epitomize a subjectivity frozen in 2011, carrying the authenticity of a beginning and a load of

earlier unfulfilled aspirations. The analogy in the film is quite striking. The protagonist was neither dead nor alive for most of the film. Instead, he remained in a temporary state in the middle, dwelling in a realm between life and death in a hospital that the film director chose to name "Hope". The character remains in a coma for most of the film's duration which makes his role quite restricted. Still, the director chooses to keep Hossam's voice quite present throughout the film by integrating scenes in which the nurse recites his diary with his voice going hand in hand with scenes featuring the character transformations of his friends. The presence of his voice in the background implies his barely perceptible existence in his friends' lives as they go on with life while awaiting his ultimate fate, whether it's reawakening or death. Besides, the diary entails an urge to keep a record of remembrance.

The presence of an absence was a theme I could hardly dismiss while doing my fieldwork. Bringing up the influence of absences on reality and the return of remnants of the past in the presence, Jacques Derrida coined the concept of "hauntology" in his seminal work *Specters of Marx* (Derrida 1993). One of my interlocutors expressed over social media, "Every time I try to escape you Egypt, I find your nightmare haunting me" (Suhaila, 28). Specters were always looming somewhere between the words in site visits and during the interviews. The figure of the ghost or the absentee often took different forms. Sometimes, it was a friend or a relative who was politically detained. Other times, it was a martyr. Specters also came in the form of flashbacks to street protests, the January revolution itself as an abstraction with a package of connotations and meanings, or an earlier subjectivity tied to it. The emotions and reactions towards these specters also varied between nostalgia, guilt, a desire to abandon the ghost and stay too far from it. In this chapter, I will explore the presence of absences with all their shades and forms in light of Derrida's notion of "hauntology" (Derrida 1993).

In the first section, I will delve into what hauntology is, and how it pertains to this study. I argue that the ghost of the unmet hopes of the Arab Spring and recollections of events that occurred before many of my interlocutors leave the country haunt them constantly. While exile is fundamentally a physical separation of the subject from the public space in Egypt, I argue that there were three additional spheres—namely, parts of the urban landscape in Istanbul, the digital, and the artistic spaces—that frequently

sparked memories of the past and connected the expatriates back to Egypt. Some of them find a way to escape their reality and create new meanings while also reliving the pain of having to leave the country again through the artistic sphere. I will focus on the sentiment of nostalgia in the second section and demonstrate how it manifested in various situations. In this ethnography and in the words of my interlocutors, nostalgia was frequently associated with agony and unrealized potential rather than with a romanticized view of Egypt or the revolution. The last section of this chapter will examine the impact of guilt and how it connects to "hauntology". I argue that many of my interlocutors expressed condemnation of either themselves or the group of political migrants and exiled political opponents.

2.2. A Blast from the Past: Understanding Hauntology

Ali, an old actor who played the role of a jailer in the drama series, breathed a deep sigh of sorrow and looked at Jamal, his fellow actor, sharing the heavy thought that had just crossed his mind. He expressed his sympathy toward the political prisoners in Egypt. During the break, Ali revealed to his friend that the atmosphere of the filming location and the role he played made him acutely fathom what it is like to be a political detainee. That was a moment when the specter appeared out of the blue and had a profound influence on Ali's emotional condition. This brings one to the concept of "hauntology'' which was first introduced by Jacques Derrida in his book *Specters of Marx* published in 1993 (Derrida 1993). Derrida uses Hamlet from Shakespeare's play as the starting point for his argumentation. He focuses mainly on the ghost in the play which is Hamlet's father and ponders the popular line from Hamlet in which he expresses "The time is out of joint" (Fisher 2012, p. 18). Derrida emphasizes the grieving act towards the ghost which leads to a hauntological condition. Accordingly, he investigates the influence Marx plays in the present. The figure of the specter in Derrida's conceptualization does not possess a corporeal being. Still, it bears an absent presence that impacts both the present and the future. Derrida emphasizes "a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come back" (Derrida 2012, p. 123).

Hamlet's line which Derrida brings up also emphasizes an alternative manner of perceiving and understanding time which ceases to be linear as conventionally imagined. The typical sequence of time that frames a past followed by a presence

leading to a future is challenged and a more complex conceptualization of time is offered instead. Derrida illustrates that "Time is disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down, deranged, both out of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted" (Derrida 2012, p. 20). In 2017, Omar Robert Hamilton published a novel titled *The City Always Wins* that traces the story of a group of activists during and in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution. Hala Sami offers an analysis of the novel in light of Derrida's hauntology, highlighting Hamilton's choice to dismantle the linearity of time in his narrative. Sami emphasizes:

> The novel begins with the "Tomorrow" section, then, "Today" and finally, "Yesterday", so that past, present, and future are jumbled, yielding a reshuffled temporal structure, tracing the future back to the past, while the latter is constantly being superimposed on the present time, which is the default time (Sami 2021, p. 382).

One of my interlocutors expressed this wreckage of time, clarifying that he constantly feels that his time had stopped on the day of the massacre, and there shall be a moment in time in which he will go back to that day and life will unfold differently. Both the past and the future haunt the subject and become vividly existing in the present in a visualization that merges the three elements of time and highlights their overlapping.

Besides the temporal aspect of hauntology, there is also a spatial dimension to it. Fisher marks "Haunting can be seen as intrinsically resistant to the contraction and homogenization of time and space. It happens when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time" (Fisher 2012, p.19). Michael Fiddler also contributes to this 'spatio-hauntology' discussion by laying forth a method for analyzing how social traumatic experiences are "integrated" into urban settings. One of my interviewees who lost her father in the *Rabaa* massacre and who was forced to migrate to Turkey six years ago revealed that she experienced a turning point in her relationship with Egypt. After four years of expatriation, Sana had to visit Egypt to issue a passport for her newly born daughter. Sana explained that she was immensely nostalgic to the extent that she thought she would kiss the soil of the homeland the moment she reaches it. However, she felt nothing but a strong emotion of anger upon her arrival.

> I felt like crying all the time. I smelled injustice in the scent of the air. I sensed the odor of blood more than I did in 2013. For me, these streets were renewed over blood. Now, it's very

> silent, more like a utopia. So, it triggers you even more and leaves you wondering: How is life flowing so normally when in this exact revived space someone was murdered? (Sana, 25).

After that visit to Cairo, Sana made a firm decision that she is never going back to the country, and she explained that all her nostalgic sentiments faded away. In the film *Ghost Dance* (McMullen 1983) starring Derrida, it is hinted that each city produces its own mythology to forget something terrible or awful. For this reason, Derrida highlights that we ought to consider things outside of the myth while letting go of nostalgia (Södergren 2022, p. 4). Here nostalgia pertains to a reality that does not exist, a condition which I will unpack further in the coming section.

What becomes valuable to look at in Sana's narrative and her usage of a sensorial metaphor, smelling injustice in the air, is how the phantom becomes incorporated into corporality, both within the body and in the public space. Sana clarified that contrary to common beliefs, her emotions mature and become embodied. She explained that people find it strange that she is still grieving her murdered father after all these years. Yet, she emphasized that this embodiment of emotions that occurs over time makes the memory of her father much more hurtful than before. In *The Streets Are Talking to Me: Affective Fragments in Sisi's Egypt*, Malmström brings up the emotions of one of her interlocutors who revealed that she sees and senses dead bodies from the days of the revolts the moment she leaves out her apartment in downtown Cairo (Malmström 2019, p. 51). Fiddler remarks "those instances of the traumatic are locked away within the space of the present. Or rather, it is within and to the side; it is a supplement that goes unsaid and unseen, yet emerges through spatially somatic symptoms, events, and tics" (Fiddler 2019, p. 469). Exile, then, becomes a condition that separates the subjects from contacting Egypt's public space and the specters embedded in it. Still, the digital sphere becomes yet again a mode of connection to this space.

To most of my interlocutors, the Egyptian public space with all its materiality and sentimentality is distant, absent, and only accessible through virtuality or digital platforms. While carrying a digital ethnography, however, it was quite compelling to see how Istanbul's cityscape also carried phantoms that influenced my interlocutors while experiencing the city. On many occasions, I found young Egyptian expatriates sharing a photo they captured of a wall in Istanbul that carries a sign featuring an image of the deceased president, Mohamed Morsi with a Turkish subtitle that states "Onlar

adamı" which translates to "They were men". These few words attached to the image are a quotation from Morsi's last public speech preceding his detention. While the sign pertains to Egypt's political sphere, it is located on different public walls of Istanbul, highlighting the absence of many opponents from the city of Cairo and their presence in exile. But then, the circulation of these pictures on the internet connects those exiles back to their country as they share them with an audience who resides in Egypt. Here the public space of Egypt together with that of Turkey and the digital space all overlap and intermingle with one another. Despite Sana's choice to abandon the Egyptian public space that evokes her embodied pain, the ghosts continue to reinforce their presence on the city walls of the new space of exile.

In addition to the urban city space, Fiddler extends hauntology theories to artistically created space. Derrida shows that "cinema is the art of allowing ghosts to come back" (McMullen 1983). One of my interviewees who works as an art director and who was among a crew working on a drama project that tackles the issue of political imprisonment in Egypt disclosed to me that he had to sleep in the filming location that is a prison. Amir pronounced that men often suppress their emotions and do not prefer to share them with their fellows. Yet on that night, he could not sleep and he recognized his friend who could not sleep either. Both Amir and his friend were imprisoned before they left the country. "The moment each of us takes a break, the general atmosphere immediately reminds us of voices embedded in our ears. I hate Egypt so much", he continued as he took a deep breath.

The term "hauntology" is a portmanteau formulated from the fusion of two words. The first is "haunt" which refers to the appearance or the materialization of a ghost or an absent figure. The second word is "ontology" which is concerned with the nature of being. In that sense, the term as a whole translates to "the persistence of a present past or "the return of the dead" (Sami 2021, p. 380). Mark Fisher reflects further on Derrida's coining of the term. He remarks that Derrida was attempting to challenge the conventional 'ontology' which illustrates being exclusively based on existence and presence while dismissing the profound role that absences play in this illustration. Fisher writes "Everything that exists is possible only on the basis of a whole series of absences, which precede and surround it, allowing it to possess such consistency and intelligibility that it does" (Fisher 2014, p. 17). Fisher moves on to emphasize that

there are mainly two directions in “hauntology”. The first refers to “the no longer” that belongs to the past. The second direction has to do with “the not yet” or “the future-to-come”, and this one relates to aspirations that were never actualized. On that note, Fisher clarifies that this type of ghost is what Marx and Engels meant when they spoke of the “specter of communism” in the opening words of the *Communist Manifesto*, a form of virtuality whose impending arrival was already threatening the status quo (Fisher 2014, p. 19).

During our interview, Amir told me that one of his all-time favorite movies is a Brazilian one. He illustrated that the film’s duration is around fifty minutes and it is filled with complete silence. Still, he found himself watching it over and over again. The film traces the story of three political detainees who were kept in prison for eleven years. Towards the end of the movie, they were finally able to retain their freedom and made a revolution that ultimately succeeded. “I watch the final scene daily. Deep down, I just long for doing the same exact thing they did. The film allows me a dopamine boost even though I am aware that it is a temporary and illusory feeling” (Amir, 27). Amir’s father, who is still a political prisoner in Egypt, as well as Amir himself were detained before being forced to leave the country. He elaborated further that every time he watched the film, he did not see the faces of the actors. Instead, he spontaneously replaced them with his own face together with his father’s. This acutely sums up the two directions of hauntology that Derrida has proposed. The ghost in the room comes in two figures. The first was Amir’s traumatic personal memory of torture and imprisonment. The second was the remembrance of his absent father. Both ghosts belong to actualized past realities. Yet, there is one more specter that is recognized which is his strong desire and longing for a revolution to erupt and put an end to that inner pain. This specter had never come into being and thus belonged to the realm of a possible future. Here one realizes how the past, present, and future visit all at once and miraculously intermingle in one dopamine boost. Here also comes the “agency of the virtual and the absent” that Derrida proposes and which eventually impacts the affects, patterns of behavior, choices of action, and even the everyday minute preferences of what to watch for entertainment and relief.

2.3. Nostalgia and the Specter at the Feast

The first time I came across the theme of nostalgia in the field was during my site visit to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) Annual *Iftar* that was held on April 9, 2022. This *iftar* was an old ritual that the MB used to carry in Egypt for years. Each year, the Brotherhood hosts a gala dinner at a five-star hotel during the holy month of Ramadan and invites a multitude of guests from a variety of backgrounds, including public figures, members of the elite (Reporter, 2007). This year, however, there were two *iftars* carried out, one on April 4 and the other on April 9. This is largely due to the recent internal discords and split that occurred between the MB leaders abroad. The dispute began when the current London-based acting general guide, Ibrahim Mounir, fired Mahmoud Hussein, the former secretary general of the MB from his position, accusing him of administrative and financial corruption. A group of the MB members and leaders residing in Turkey were dissatisfied with the decision, declaring that because the Shura Council elections had been postponed by six months, Mounir was no longer a legitimate leader. The continuation and escalation of the internal contention led to the split between both groups (Ayyash 2020). This rupture in the internal fabric of the organization was indirectly brought up in some of the delivered speeches during the *Iftar* I attended. Many of the speakers emphasized the theme and value of unity, particularly that between the exiled opposition in an attempt to foster subtle messages to both parties to surpass the conflict and reunite.

Due to time constraints, I could only attend the April 9 *iftar*. Still, the earlier one was all live streamed on the internet which allowed me to have a glimpse over the themes discussed in it as well. The lavish, spacious hotel dining hall, mostly occupied by Egyptian prominent opposing figures, was fully decorated with large portraits of martyrs of the revolution. At the lobby entrance was a poster with a picture of the former president Morsi accompanied by an excerpt from his last delivered speech before his detention. Not all the attendees were Egyptians; there were also guests from other Arab nationalities along with Turkish representatives from the AKP party. Among the speakers at the gala dinner was Ayman Nour, a former presidential candidate and the head of the Egyptian Tomorrow Party. Nour was also forced to leave the country following the coup. He became quite active in the opposition abroad, establishing the *Al Sharq* anti-regime TV channel and heading the newly established

coalition Union of Egyptian National Forces Abroad that its formation was announced on the tenth anniversary of the ouster of the former president Mubarak on February 11, 2021. The presenter asked Nour to go up on stage and deliver a short speech. Nour started his speech by disclosing that he had opted not to give any sort of public address since the beginning of the holy month. This is primarily because he could not bring himself to begin his speech with the traditional holiday greeting, "Every year and you're in goodness". He wondered what kind of goodness" would he be talking about given the current political situation in Egypt. He, then, brought up the word "nostalgia", illustrating the etymology of the term. He clarified:

> The word is of Greek origin and has two parts. The first means to return home while the second depicts a longing mixed with anguish and pain. Especially during Ramadan, we all get hit by missing our homeland. But this year, I am experiencing a rather different form of nostalgia, namely a nostalgia for the "Truth" that is strikingly absent from the motherland (Nour, Site Visit 2).

By bringing that up, Nour was particularly alluding to a state-sponsored drama series called *Al Ikhtiyar* (The Choice, 2022) aired every Ramadan in an effort to portray historical events after the military coup in 2013 from the viewpoint of the regime. With a tone fueled with urgency, Nour asserted the significance and the necessity of initiating a collective project to gather the remnants of our memories and keep an alternative record of the historical events. Here the nostalgia for the "Truth" that Nour is deeply longing for again belongs to the "not yet". It does not refer to a particular idealized moment in the past that was free from state propaganda and fraud representations but rather to an idealized abstraction of a possible future. Jonatan Södergren sensibly remarks that although the majority of academics are aware of the essentially melancholic aspect of nostalgia and its Greek origins that emphasize a hurt from a past injury, still the spotlight is shed on its positive bearings most of the time (Södergren 2022, p.3).

In his book *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*, Fred Davis clarifies that nostalgia is not a typical memory (Davis 1979). Rather, it is a specific type of remembrance that is set apart from others by the "exceptional past" that it carries, a past in which good events are given greater weight while unpleasant memories are omitted. The author also introduces the term "antiquarian feeling", distinguishing between it and nostalgia (Davis 1979). While the former refers to a longing for a

condition that was never lived, nostalgia is a depiction of a yearning for a moment that was actually experienced. In the common imagination, the word has thus become a synonym for glorifying and appreciating the past (Södergren 2022, p. 3). For this particular reason, I was quite reluctant to use the word nostalgia to describe the feeling that kept breaking through during the fieldwork. The presence of an absence did not always translate to a desire to relive a moment. Quite the opposite, many of my interlocutors were more lenient to distance themselves from the past and from Egypt instead of indulging in romanticization. Still underneath the surface, there was a longing not for the past January with all its painful consequences but rather for the abstraction and supposition of it that was miscarried. Nour did not express nostalgia for the 18 days of the Revolution. Instead, he yearns for the right to a truthful narration of events which is part of the values intrinsic to the idea of the revolution.

2.4. Racked with Guilt

At one of the social gatherings I attended as part of my fieldwork, Nada looked at Zeina and praised her winter jacket. Zeina replied that she did not want to buy any heavy jackets for this winter not until she was forced by a friend to get one. Zeina worked and continues to work as a human rights researcher, documenting cases of political detention in Egypt. Her father as well is still detained. She illustrated that she wanted to share with her father a solidarity feeling and experience a glimpse of the cold he has to struggle with given the inhumane conditions of imprisonment. When I sat with Zeina for an interview, she told me that at some point, she got overwhelmed and intensely affected by the cases she writes about and felt utterly helpless. After packing her travel bags, she called one of her friends who works as a lawyer in Egypt, informing him that she had decided to return back to Cairo and she wants him to be her lawyer. “I was quite certain that my arrival at Cairo airport would translate to my immediate arrest, but I could not bear the burden of responsibility anymore. At least, if I am jailed I would not be that crippled with guilt”, she explained (Zeina, 30).

Guilt appeared again when one of my younger interlocutors explained that from time to time he rewatched videos of bulldozers and armored vehicles plowing at the protestors that were captured on the day of the Rabaa massacre. Anas was only around fourteen years old when the massacre took place. He used to regularly accompany his

father to the sit-in, but he was not there on that day. Oddly enough, the first emotion he expressed while illustrating the influence these records have on him was that he hates himself every time he watches them. Emotions of hatred and anger that are presumed to be directed towards the perpetrator were rather expressed in relation to the self. Self-loathing and liability were sometimes conveyed on an individual level. At other times, these emotions were directed against the collectivity of political opposition in exile. For instance, Hassan who is a twenty-five-years-old artist told me that there was one incident that had a huge influence on him. One of his friends arrived from Egypt to Istanbul in the company of an eighteen-years-old fellow and decided to stay at Hassan's house for a few days before departing to Syria to join the armed resistance against the Syrian regime there. The 18-years-old youngster fled Egypt without informing his parents of his leaving and intentions afterward. Hassan overheard a phone call between the youngster and his father, who was crying and begging him to come back and refrain from going to Syria. "I could have simply called his father and handed him my address so that he can come and take his son, but I did not do that; the lad is now dead", Hassan achingly added.

In a series of articles titled "New Stories in Exile" that Mada Masr publishes, an independent Egyptian online newspaper, the author interviews diverse exiles and traces their current emotions. One of her interviewees, Anno Kachine, is a thirty-year-old who resides in New York City. After his release from prison, Kachine had to flee the country in 2017. Kachine expresses to the writer:

> I worked on projects about the revolution, prison, the collapse of hope, the immovability of time, the death penalty, solitary confinement — about how I'm free here but my mind is still in Egypt, where there are no freedoms…I was interested in expressing myself and telling people here about what happens in that part of the world. I also felt a sense of responsibility and guilt for leaving (El-Mahdawy 2020).

The guilt for leaving emerged again during one of the site visits. In one of the forums that I attended, a forty-year-old exiled Egyptian doctor who has a well-known YouTube channel that engagingly tackles political subjects delivered a public talk on content creation over digital media. After the talk, a group of young men and women who were mostly Syrians and Egyptians approached him to ask some questions. Eventually, the group started to increase in number, and a side discussion session started taking place. It was quite stimulating to see how most of the posed questions

had nothing to do with the topic of the initial lecture on content creation. Most of the questions, however, were political in nature. One of the Syrian attendees expressed a concern that has been troubling him for a while, sharing that ever since he left Syria, he has been regularly asking himself whether he took the right decision or not. He clarified that the root of this uneasiness comes from the memory of the troubled status quo he chose to leave behind when staying and resisting was also a possible choice. The other discomfort he shared was that he feels like he is moving on with his life in exile and gradually getting secluded from the Syrian cause. The exiled Egyptian doctor advised him to abstain from being trapped inside this train of thought. Nevertheless, he criticized the prevalence of a tendency to indulge in a self-victimizing narrative that hinders many of the exiles from holding themselves accountable for part of the ongoing political situation. He was particularly skeptical of a narrative that solely highlights victimhood while constantly emphasizing the wickedness of the oppressor in juxtaposition to the righteousness and goodness of the oppressed.

In *The Question of German Guilt*, Karl Jaspers introduces the notion of "political guilt". He differentiates it from legal and moral guilt, illustrating that "the source of all our different sorts of guilt, including political guilt, is the fact that power is not in the service of the basic rights of all citizens. Instead, the opposite is true" (Herrera-Romero 2019, p.202). Södergren links Derridean hauntology with Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of collective guilt. He adopts Arendt's (1968) definition of collective guilt as guilt by association or the concept that those who are seen to be members of a particular group have responsibility for an act or behavior that members of that group have displayed, even though they were not directly engaged (Södergren 2022, 2). Both Arendt and Jaspers establish a difference between communal guilt and collective responsibility. Because it assigns responsibility without taking into account the deeds or intentions of specific group members, collective guilt is unjust. On the other hand, the attribution of community responsibility is just because it solely pertains to a liability based on civic obligations (Schaap 2001, p. 750).

2.5. Conclusion: Living with Ghosts

In his article "Hauntology: Theorising the Spectral in Psychological Anthropology", Byron J. Good illustrates:

> Subjectivity denotes a new attention to hierarchy, violence, and subtle modes of internalized anxieties that link subjection and subjectivity, and an urgent sense of the importance of linking national and global economic and political processes to the most intimate forms of everyday experience. It places the political at the heart of the psychological and the psychological at the heart of the political (Good 2019, p. 413).

The author writes these words as a reflection on what Fischer named "post-trauma societies". The writer emphasizes that these communities often have "spectral subjectivities" in the sense that individuals belonging to these societies have to grow and rebuild their subjectivities in the company of a ghost (Good 2019, p. 413). The group of inquisitive youngsters at the forum surrounding the forty-year-old exiled Egyptian doctor all stood in silence as he suddenly stopped talking and broke into tears as he recalled a close friend whom he had lost in the days of the revolts. That was a moment when the phantom made a presence. Intriguingly, two of the young Egyptian expatriates who were participating in this conversation following the talk captured a photo of the moment and shared it on their Instagram stories, highlighting that the aura of that gathering reminded them of *Tahrir* Square.

Perhaps most of the discussion covered in this chapter was summed up in this setting, starting from the ghost that comes back in a spur-of-the-moment to sentiments of guilt and liability uttered with every question to the nostalgia for the square that is more of an abstraction than it being a space. Derrida's concept of hauntology, thus, becomes a useful analytical tool to explore the emotional dynamics of the community of Egyptian political migrants in Istanbul. The regular presence of an absence that has a temporal as well as a spatial dimension becomes significant to look at. The revisits of phantoms, as I have previously mentioned, often occur in different forms and lead to variant emotions and reactions. When Sana had access to the urban landscape of Cairo after years of expatriation only to find herself haunted by the memory of the murdered, that was a moment when her nostalgia was turned into anger that eventually led to abandonment and disengagement. She revealed that prior to this visit, she used to engage in some of the oppositional initiatives carried out in Istanbul. However, this was no longer the case afterward.

While exile is essentially a physical separation of the subject from the Egyptian public space, I argue that there were three other spheres that regularly triggered phantoms of the past and tied the expatriates back to Egypt, namely the urban, the digital, and the

artistic spaces. The variant city walls in Istanbul carrying protest symbols that some of my interlocutors were circulating over the internet are among the examples of how specters become embedded even in the urban fabric of the public space in exile. Ahmad, a 30-year-old actor, also told me that he started crying in one of the protests that were held in support of Palestine in Istanbul because the atmosphere in the public space immediately reminded him of the days of the revolts. Here, again, the phantoms reappear in the guise of nostalgia for "the no longer" and the "not yet".

The artistically-created space was also another site for evoking past memories' remnants and eliciting a reconnection with the homeland. Hassan, a twenty-five-year-old artist, expressed that he was trying hard to distance himself from Egypt's political, social, and public sphere. Yet again, he found himself the art director of an award-winning political thriller film, *Boy from Heaven* (2022), that traces the relationship between *Al-Azhar* University and the state which required his deep research and an entire recreation of a physical space that mimics the public space in Cairo. "I kept ignoring any news from Egypt as much as I could. But even when I tried to escape, I couldn't. There were new details that I was not even aware of about Egypt that I discovered while working. I was literally making Cairo in Istanbul", Hassan illustrated (Hassan, 25). That was also the case with Amir who revealed that he was in charge of finishing a media project related to the Rabaa massacre which he himself witnessed. Yet, he soon apologized for not being able to work on it, highlighting that the moment he heard the sounds of the records, his body recalled all the memory and reacted intensely to them.

In this chapter, I have discussed two of the affects that were entirely intrinsic to the presence of absence, namely guilt and nostalgia. In the following chapter, I will delve more into realms of in-betweenness and how my interlocutors deal with these ghosts while hesitating whether to hold onto or let go of them. Hauntology essentially comes with a condition of liminality, as it dismantles and complicates both time and space. Therefore, living with the phantom produces emotions of ambivalence which I will be discussing in light of Turner's liminality (1967) and Szakolczai's permanent liminality (2017) in the coming chapter.

CHAPTER III

LIVING ON A THRESHOLD

Illustration 3.1. A Site Visit by Myself at the Filming Location of the Drama Series *Dungeon 55* in Beykoz, Istanbul

3.1. Introduction

After a long transportation journey, I finally arrived at “Beykoz Kundura” (Beykoz Shoe) located on the Northern end of the Bosphorus shore in the district of Beykoz. “Beykoz Kundura” is an industrial cultural area with a spacious complex, encompassing numerous film studios. I stopped at the entrance to call Jamal, an Egyptian actor in his late seventies. When I initially communicated with Jamal to ask him for an interview, he invited me to join them during their last filming days. Jamal worked as a TV presenter on one of the Egyptian anti-regime channels that broadcast from Turkey. In the meantime, he also contributed to different drama projects as an actor. Jamal’s presence allowed me to smoothly integrate with the community over there. His old age and charismatic character granted him credibility and a wide acceptance among his fellows which also made my access to the group quite a bit easier. I entered the filming location (figure 2, above) which featured a dull prison

building with lots of dimly-lit prison cells and strong cigarette smoke. Jamal started introducing me to different artists. They were filming a drama series titled *Dungeon 55* (2023, unreleased drama in the shooting stage) that narrated the story of several political prisoners and their everyday struggles with a psychopathic police officer. Around 8 PM, the director finally gave them a dinner break. We all sat for dinner in one of the empty prison cells they use as a lounge to rest and change their customs. Salah, a well-known exiled Egyptian actor in his early 1960s, sat on the couch beside Jamal, facing another old Syrian actor. He expressed a great sense of relief and excitement for the coming day. March 29, the day he was awaiting, marked the last day of the project after exhausting months of filming. It also marked the day on which Egypt played a football match against Senegal at the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers. Additionally, the holy month of Ramadan was almost approaching.

Salah revealed that he could not wait to finally take a long break, enjoy Ramadan and watch the match. Nevertheless, Salah confessed that he was struggling with mixed feelings towards the match. On the one hand, he wished for Egypt to win and qualify for the World Cup. On the other hand, he knew very well how Egypt's winning would serve for state propaganda and the further legitimization of the current regime that he opposes. Jamal joined the conversation, affirming that he also shared the same feelings. Jamal added that he constantly finds himself stuck in a serious internal conflict where he could no longer identify how to feel towards the homeland. He elaborated that he carried in his heart dual and conflicting emotions of both hate and love. This state of in-betweenness suspended amid negative and positive sentiments is my central focus in this chapter. In light of Victor Turner's theory of liminality, I explore these ambivalent emotions that my interlocutors carry. In the first section, I will be exploring the history of the concept and its relevance to my interlocutors' affect and realities. In the second section, I will be looking at emotions of ambivalence and liminality in remolding new subjectivities abroad. In the third and final section, I will be delving into the emotions of skepticism, doubts, and mistrust that many of my interlocutors carry towards carriers of most of the oppositional initiatives held from exile.

3.2. Between Two Stools: Conceptualizing Liminality

While temporarily living by the seaside town of Hastings after leaving behind Manchester and waiting for his U.S. visa that was deferred due to his refusal to join the military service during World War II, Victor Turner accidentally came across the seminal work of Arnold van Gennep in the summer of 1963. Van Gennep published the *Rites of Passage* in 1909 in which he was studying periods of transitions, arguing that in all societies, there are always particular rites to mark off phases of transformation. He was the first to introduce the concept of liminality (Thomassen, Wydra and Horvath 2015, p. 2). They interestingly remark that when Turner read the work of van Gennep, he was himself living in a state of liminality. Ian Skoggard, similarly, clarifies that when Turner started to develop the concept further, again he was in a liminal state of being, leaving "behind a class-ridden and exhausted post World War II England to join…the field among the Ndembu in 1950s Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). The excitement of the journey becomes a cathartic purging of past intellectual and emotional attachments while opening up new theoretical insights and understandings (Skoggard and Waterston 2016, p.114). Liminality in Turner's conceptualization is a state of in-betweenness that could be associated with both spatiality and temporality. The word initially comes from the Latin word "limen" which translates to "threshold". In rituals of transition like individuals moving from childhood to adulthood, there are usually three stages that start with separation followed by liminality, and ending with aggregation. While dissecting phases of liminality, Turner also introduces the condition he names "anti-structure" that is intrinsic to liminality. He illustrates that in various social processes, not to mention uprisings and revolutions, the configurations of the everyday get inverted, and still new structures are yet to be inaugurated. Turner writes:

> Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. Thus, liminality is frequently linked to death, being in the womb, invisibility, darkness, bisexuality, wilderness, and the eclipse of the sun or moon (Turner and Abrahams 2017, p. 95).

While attending one of the social gatherings carried out by a group of Egyptians living in Istanbul as a participant observant, Salih, a father of three in his late 40s, used a metaphor to describe why he thinks that most of the collective efforts done by Egyptians in exile are ineffective. Salih gave the analogy of a group of expatriates

coming from a desert environment that has just landed on a new island which they are completely unfamiliar with. Immediately upon their arrival, the group started working using the exact surviving techniques they were previously living with before leaving their homelands. None of the new arrivals paused to observe the new space and fathom its nature that is radically different from their past habitus nor did any of them thoroughly grasped that their stay on the Island is permanent, not temporary. Prof. Amin, an academic and former professor at Cairo University in his late sixties, recounted that he was fired from his job, banned from travel, and was wanted for arrest due to his political affiliations and activities. As a consequence, he was forced to immigrate illegally through the Sudanese borders. He revealed that when he arrived in Turkey, he initially believed that he would stay in exile for two, six, or eight months at most. He could not imagine that he might live abroad for years. In a similar vein, Jamila illustrated that when she was also forced to leave Egypt during winter, she decided not to take any of her summer clothes, believing that the status quo may change in a spur of a second and she can be back before the summer season. She explained that until very recently, she used to possess very few furniture pieces, thinking that her stay in Turkey was impermanent. In September 2019, Mohamed Ali who is a contractor and an actor in exile shared a series of videos that went viral on the internet, sparking several anti-regime demonstrations in Cairo. Soon, there was a crackdown on the protests and numerous people got arrested (Michaelson 2019). Jamila told me that when she saw the outbursts of these anti-government rallies on TV, she immediately started packing her travel luggage. “My husband started making fun of me. He couldn’t believe that I was still optimistic about the possibility of returning back to Egypt,” she continued. In her ethnography on political exiles who had fled their country following the 1973 military coup in Chile, Marcela Cornejo writes “The return has a pivotal importance in the exile experience; a forbidden return will determine—paradoxically—a certain tendency to interpret the stay in the host country as a transitory phase, thus making adaptation even more difficult” (Cornejo 2008, p. 336).

Árpád Szakolczai (2016) reworks the concept of liminality, introducing a particular condition that he names “Permanent liminality”. Szakolczai remarks that there are two major shortcomings at the heart of Turner’s analysis of the concept. The first is that he restricts the term to scaled-down tribal communities. Secondly, Szakolczai accuses

Turner of attaching merely a positive connotation to the condition of liminality. He illustrates that Turner elaborates on the creative potentialities inherited in periods of liminality which Szakolczai does not deny. However, Szakolczai points out that there are conditions in which liminality becomes enduring, and the state of anguish and uncertainty that comes with this condition cannot be overlooked or romanticized. Szakolczai writes:

> A liminal situation is by definition temporary, transitory, transient: a brief moment of passage in between two stable states. However, it might conceivably happen that a temporary situation becomes extended, lasting, eventually all but a permanent state. This is the familiar experience of 'time stood still': an illness that was supposed to last for a few days becoming acute; a war that was supposed to last for a few months dragging on for years and years … If a community or an entire society enters liminality, it is likely that imitative processes will suddenly escalate. Everybody looks to "others" for guidance (Szakolczai 2017, p.234).

Harmony Siganporia and Frank G. Karioris, for instance, use Szakolczai's conceptualization to analyze the case of half-widows in Kashmir. The term 'Half-widow' refers to women whose spouses have gone missing during the war. Eventually, the legal status of these women remained ambiguous for years, for they are neither recognized as windows nor married (Siganporia and Karioris 2016, p. 21). Szakolczai's "Permanent liminality" becomes quite helpful in my analysis, as it helps fathom the prolonged state of in-betweenness that many of my interlocutors are living in. The metaphor of the island that Salih uses captures the essence of this condition. In a recently released short documentary (Middle East Eye 2021), an exiled Egyptian lawyer expresses "We had to leave Egypt, but we only left physically. My mind, my heart, my soul, my family, and my whole world are still in Egypt. I anticipate that maybe not anytime soon, but I am certain that the revolution that was seeded in January will last long, even if it is underground" (Middle East Eye 2021). Liminality in the case of the Egyptian political migrants in Turkey carries different aspects. While their physical presence is in Turkey, their political selves are still highly tied to Egypt. One aspect of this liminality lies in the conflictual emotions of wanting to both remember and forget. Hassan, for instance, revealed that he genuinely wishes to completely forget the day of the massacre. Towards the end of our conversation, however, he told me that he has photos of that day on his camera that he still keeps and looks at from time to time. He also illustrated that he found a soundtrack on the internet titled "The Carnage" (2013). The sound collage combines the sounds of hovering military aircraft, bullets, screams, prayers, and sirens from the day of the Rabaa massacre. Hassan

shared that he finds himself every once in a while, searching up that track and listening to it despite his deep desire to let go of that memory. In the coming two sections, I will be digging into another two layers of that liminality, namely the ambivalence when it comes to constructing one's identity and the fogginess towards the whole political situation in Egypt.

3.3. Ambivalent Selves

> When I started the mission, I was capable of seeing everything with clarity. I was sure of what I was doing. After that, I started to feel like I was seeing the picture from behind a pane of glass. Gradually, a layer began to form like dust. The problem is that the dust started to increase to the degree where I no longer see anything. A blurry picture. Memories mixed with dreams...with illusions...with truths.
>
> Yahya al Manqabadi, in Daoud Abdel Sayed's film *Land of Fear*, 1999.

These lines are from an Egyptian movie titled *Land of Fear* (1999.) The story's main character was performing these words in a scene that became very popular. One of my interviewees revealed that he plays that scene's video every morning while preparing his coffee. He could deeply relate to every word. Playing them regularly helped him make sense of the past years as if he was holding a picture that allows him to see better as he explained. "I don't wish to change anything about that picture, and I am not sure if things will change", he continued. He moved on to demonstrate an internal conflict that constantly gives him a strong sense of confusion and fogginess. He illustrated that he is interiorly living in two parallel universes. On the one hand, he was getting married and planning to travel and build a stable life for his family. On the other hand, his parents nurtured in him an identity of a revolutionary reformer, and he felt as if he is gradually losing this identity the more he moves on with life. He clarified that he continuously asked himself "Where is the revolutionist? Where is the one who wanted to feed the people? Where is the one who walked the streets, and wanted to change something? This past self is almost dying." I asked him if he wanted this persona to die. He answered that he doesn't have an answer to this question even though it keeps coming into his mind. The only partially satisfying answer he has reached is that he will continue building a stable life. Yet the moment a revolution outbursts, he shall be the first to join, leaving everything behind because this is where he belongs. Then, he paused for a few seconds, then broke the silence, saying, "I wish I could heal from that past identity. I need someone to tell me that I don't and will not belong there. Can you see how I am hemming and hawing?".

Nader also expressed a similar liminal feeling of not knowing how to frame his subjectivity. He illustrated that he has lost hope in returning home, as it's safer for him to stay in Turkey. However, Turkey has also become a giant prison for him, as he depicted. This is because his Egyptian passport had expired. When he tried renewing it from the Egyptian Embassy in Turkey, his request was rejected and the embassy expelled him. He explained:

> Every one of us is barely surviving on his own. So, sometimes I find myself wondering: why did it all happen from the beginning? Some see it as a test from God. Others think God chose us. How do I see it? At this point, I can barely see anything. I am lost and not sure in which direction I should point my compass. Should I return to the phase when I was completely silent and disengaged in politics? Or, does my voice combined with the others' convey something? (Nader, 30)

In 2021, several exiled artists and film directors released a short film through the Middle East Eyes titled *The Exiles: A Generation's Story* (2021). The film features five Egyptian activists who are living in exile while they narrate their current emotions towards their past participation in the revolution and their new lives abroad. There comes a part towards the end of the film in which the director chooses to juxtapose his interviewees' past identities with their new ones. For instance, while one of the interlocutors speaks, the background features the identification of "Activist, dentist, spokesman for the Freedom and Justice party". Then, these words get scratched by a light grayish paint and replaced with "TV presenter, exiled" (MEE 2021). This artistic choice highlights the fact that so many of the January participants had developed an identity associated with the revolution and the years following it. In the time being, however, this identity is struggling to endure. Guobin Yang (Yang 2000) focuses on the Red Guards student-led social movement in China and its long-term effects on its participants. Yang argues that the liminal nature of revolutions and social movements allows a chance for individual subjectivities to remold themselves creatively (Yang 2000, p.383). Many of my interlocutors acquired an identity that was oriented by the 2011-2013 political unfolding, and they were not so sure whether they wanted to preserve it anymore. Zeina graduated from college with a degree in engineering. Yet for almost the past ten years, she had been working as a human rights researcher, documenting cases of violations and political imprisonments. A few months following our interview, she enthusiastically shared on a What's App group that she had finally started a job in her field. The first reply she received was from a friend asking her to

remind the group of her initial expertise. Rarely did anyone knew that Zeina was originally an engineer because she has been regularly identified as a rights activist and researcher for the past years.

Mark Allen Peterson (2015) applies Turner's concept of liminality to protesters of Tahrir Square during the 2011 uprising. Peterson brings up Turner's analysis of the pilgrimage. Turner argued that:

> Pilgrimage encourages people to move both literally and symbolically out of their everyday lives (separation) and temporarily enter alternative social and spiritual worlds (liminality). While in this liminal state, one loses one's old identity, formed by normative social categories such as class, race, and gender; and freely and spontaneously encounters others (communitas). After such an experience, the person ultimately returns to the place from which he or she had come (reaggregation), often in a socially transformed way (Peterson 2015, p. 167).

Peterson applies the same argumentation to the comers and goers of *Tahrir* Square. He illustrates that the ones who participated during the 18 days of the uprising used to separate themselves from their neighborhoods and social circles to take part in the sit-in and then return home (Peterson 2015, p.168). Unlike their fellows who camped at the square, the author explains that the liminal condition of the journeyers back and forth allowed them to transmit the different reactions of the city residents to the protesters while also transferring aspects of the uncommon social structure of the liminal sit-in to their original spaces (Peterson 2015, p. 167). To zoom out a little bit and look at the entire phase from a distance, I suggest that many of my interlocutors had acquired a new identity in the years following January until the moment of their involuntary departure from the country.

There was a particular subjectivity crafted during that phase, namely the "rebellious/reformer". This identity was formed around the notion of resistance, a new social as well as cultural capital that revolves around a previous act of being a participant in the street protests. Consequently, this subjectivity affected individual life choices like education, career path, marriage, and circles of communication. For instance, one of my interlocutors told me that following the revolution, he strengthened his ties with circles of leftists and Islamists who participated in the uprising. The Islamists were larger in number while the leftists were more theoretically grounded according to him. Therefore, he built numerous new relationships with fellows from

both ideological hubs. He revealed that years later, he lost ties with most of his friends from these circles because he can no longer see the purpose of keeping in touch with them when the element that tied them together from the beginning has already vanished.

In her book, *The Streets Are Talking to Me: Affective Fragments in Sisi's Egypt*, Malmström (2019) offers a seminal ethnography on the role that affect and materiality play in shaping people's lives in times of transition. She touches upon the spheres in which the political meets the personal as she narrated the story of one of her interlocutors who had fallen in love during the eighteen days of the uprising with a fellow protestor. The author writes "Fatma and Hani's passion seems to have followed the rhythm of political waves in Egypt…They were in love with each other but also in love with the potentiality of a new nation—strong passion when there was hope in the air and a "dying" passion when it was not possible to grasp any public optimism or activity" (Malmström 2019, p.46). Accordingly, the subjectivity crafted as a result of the participation in the public sphere during the revolution and the years following it affected the individuals' choices in their personal spheres. Hasan, who was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, told me that he was completely disinterested in politics before he participated in the *Rabaa* sit-in. After camping in the sit-in for almost a month and witnessing the massacre in the Summer of 2013, he became more responsive to the political happenings. He reveals that now he is trying hard to detach himself from any political news, for this is who he was before living these events. While Hasan along with others were attempting to remold a new identity that is disjointed from the past political events, other interlocutors were allowed opportunities in exile based on the identities they acquired during those years. Adam, for instance, was originally a pharmacist. After the revolution, he developed a strong interest in the social sciences and in writing. Calling attention to his identity as a former activist and an author opened for him doors in the field of research in Turkey. Ahmed, also, used to be a theater actor in Egypt. He always dreamed of becoming an actor, acting on screen not only on stage. He revealed that when he first came to Turkey, he used to work as a driver not until he was offered an acting job from one of the Egyptian anti-regime TV channels airing from Turkey. Ahmed explained that at first, he did not want to be part of these channels. On the one hand, his appearance on the screens of these channels will eventually lead to a further deterioration of his situation in Egypt and he will not

be able to visit Egypt even for a vacation. On the other hand, he was not so confident in the intentions of the people running the channels. Nevertheless, he accepted the job offer, for this was the only way through which he could fulfill his dream of becoming an actor. It is this internal struggle of whether to preserve a past identity associated with the revolution or let go of it that Harmony Siganporia and Frank Karioris (Siganporia and Karioris 2016) hint at in their piece "Rupture and Exile: Permanent Liminality in Spaces for Movement and Abandonment". The authors write "It is this form of liminality that ….has to be a central concept in any exploration of exile groups which .... live in the spaces between the shorn identity markers of the past – rooted as these must be in a lost homeland – and the present, where they must be iterated or manufactured anew" (Siganporia and Karioris 2016, p. 23).

This internal battle of not knowing whether to hold onto a past identity or release that self often caused a strong sense of alienation that kept appearing in many of the interviews as well as the content of several artworks produced in exile. Foreignness and expatriation became vivid markers in the new identities of many of my interviewees. When I asked Nader to depict his emotions in the years following his departure from Egypt through art. He brought up his phone and started searching for his old notes. He told me that he wrote a few lines of poetry that best describe the emotional baggage he was still carrying. He recounted:

> Stranger, stranger even to myself. Behind me, there is history that teaches me. But my presence is confusing me. I have fear inside. I can hardly get a grip on things. Perhaps, it is my weak will. Or maybe because I cannot see. There is an urge to withdraw (Nader, 30).

Hassan also shared a self-definition that carried the same sense of estrangement. He recounted that the way he introduced himself on his Twitter account bio is through a quotation that says "I belong to all those to whom no one belongs, to all who find themselves, strangers, even from their hearts". Hassan explained this feeling of not belonging, illustrating that he does not have any positive feelings toward Egypt where he is originally from. He explained that the hardships he experienced after the military takeover were enough to erase any good memory he had in Egypt before. "I don't identify as an Egyptian, nor Turkish, nor a revolutionary", he emphasized. Amir also referred to a poetry line written by the renowned Egyptian poet Abdel Rahman el-

Abnudi in which he narrates “Do you know, my wife, what does a man in exile look like? A lonely corn stalk in a field of cumin”.

Illustration 3.2. Official Poster of the Short Film, Stranger (2016)

Source: Stranger (Gharib) film Facebook Page.

While looking up some of the artistic productions created by Egyptians in Istanbul, I came across a series of short films documenting the conditions and deep emotions of expatriates in exile titled *Stranger* (*Gharib* 2016). The film’s poster (seen in figure 3 above) features the main character, a young Egyptian actor who was forced to depart from Egypt, with a background of a sunset at a sea. The aesthetic choice of the sunset could be read as a scene symbolizing times of transitions. It is this time of the day in which the daylight gradually fades out and the night replaces the morning. In many of the scenes, the protagonist is featured while running fastly in different directions in an attempt to escape from his fluctuating thoughts. In the last episode of the short series, the main character narrates “In exile, there is no way you can forget your country, but with the passage of time, you get forgotten” (Gharib 2017). It is not only the daylight that is fleeting as the poster highlights nor is it only the memory of the exiled protagonist in the minds of his friends and family members in Egypt but the theme of vanishing also carries different aspects that need to be unpacked.

Audrone Zukauskaite (Žukauskaitė 2012) brings into discussion the nature of the characters in Samuel Beckett’s novel *The Unnamable* (1953). Zukauskaite elaborates that the characters in Beckett’s writing “are always on the edge of nothingness, about to vanish or expire… [and are] always in the process of becoming imperceptible (Žukauskaitė 2012, p.635). The author, afterward, refers to Deleuze’s reading of the novel that perceives this process of vanishing and imperceptibility as the essence of

life. Deleuze highlights the potentiality that lies at the heart of transitions, a remark which I will elaborate on later. Zukauskaite quotes a few lines that one of the characters in the novel recites, describing:

> Perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand, the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either . . .(Beckett 2010b: 100) (Žukauskaitė 2012, p. 636).

The way in which many of my interlocutors depicted their current subjectivities was quite similar to these lines. At the beginning of the interview, I asked Ahmad to introduce and describe himself. Ahmad told me that in his Facebook biography, he defines himself as "the dancer on the stairs". With this phrase, he is referencing a famous Egyptian proverb, illustrating "I am like the ones who danced in the stairwell, neither seen by those above nor those below". Ahmad explained that these lines best describe his current identity, recounting "I cannot go back to my country; and, I am not able to live comfortably in Turkey either. I am not a Muslim Brother nor am I isolated from them. I am always in the middle of everything". What is common between Beckett's characters and the ones who danced in the stairwell is that they are both imperceptible.

Falling between two stools or "the status of being stuck in the middle of things" as one of my interlocutors puts it frames the ambivalent affects that were quite manifested throughout the fieldwork. When my interviewee was expressing that there is a particular persona in him that is almost dying, he was touching upon this theme of vanishing. On the one hand, there are hurtful memories, past subjectivities that were contoured around the theme of resistance, friends, acquaintances, or family members who are absent due to the political events and whose ghosts are still hovering around. On the other hand, there is a life far distant from home that has its new dynamics and requires a remodeled subjectivity.

In her book *At the Margins of Academia: Exile, Precariousness, and Subjectivity*, Aslı Vatansever (2020) draws an essential link between precarity and subjectivity. She writes:

> Uprooting and precariousness immediately and excruciatingly remind us of the vulnerability of individual lives vis-à-vis the external forces. In this sense, exile, as a combination of both displacement and uncertainty, is a highly de-subjectivizing experience. Life in exile is a life heavily susceptible and extremely vulnerable to external effects (Vatansever 2020, p. 61).

The liminal and precarious condition that essentially accompanies the forced migration creates a space for de-subjectivization and the reconfiguration of a new subjectivity.

3.4. A Broken Trust

Ambivalence was not only manifested in the inability to decide whether to hold on to a past subjectivity or let go of its traces. Strong emotions of skepticism towards the leadership of the oppositional force abroad, leaders from the Muslim Brothers, and public figures who have once been affiliated with the January Revolution or who have been known for their activism, in general, were also a repeated burden in many of the interviews. Nader was working as an art technician at one of the Egyptian anti-regime TV channels in Turkey. He was the one responsible for the control room through which all the content came to light. He recounted that there was a time when the channels faced a major financial crisis and a lack of funding to the extent that they could not afford to pay the salaries of their employees for several months. When he could no longer borrow from his fellows to secure his necessities, Nader decided to talk with a senior colleague who presents a main show on the channel. He asked him if he could talk to the administration and request them to pay a portion of the salaries to the employees in need. The senior presenter dismissed his request and apologized for not being able to interfere. A few days before that encounter, Egypt's current president Sisi delivered a public speech in which he asked the people of Egypt to be more patient with the current status quo and stand by their homeland for another six months. On the same day in which Nader talked with the senior presenter who preferred not to interfere in the salaries issue, the presenter was supposed to bring up Sisi's speech and comment on it at the beginning of his show. Nader narrated:

> I could never forget this day in my life. I took my place in the control room. The live show started, and the giant camera started to roam around the presenter as he began his introduction with a series of rhetorical and provoking questions. Posing his words to people in Egypt, he wondered: will you be patient with Sisi for six months? Will you be patient with injustices? The moment he performed these questions, I was shaking inside. I stood up, shut down the device I was working on, cursed the whole channel out loud, and quit my job. I could no longer trust in them (Nader, 30).

Nader recounted another anecdote in which he once again felt the same ambivalent emotions. He was one of the main actors in the first feature film produced in exile. He played the role of an unjustly detained and severely tortured young man. While filming the torture scene, Nader agreed with the director that they would pour warm water over him. He depicted:

> On a cold winter's night at 3 a.m., we were filming the torture scene in an open area by the shore of Beykoz. Tied to a chair, I was wearing nothing but a short. Contrary to our agreement, I was stunned when they poured cold water over me. The director stopped filming to edit something while I stayed shivering in my place until I fainted. When I regained consciousness, I told the director that I hated him. He replied that the only thing that concerns him now is that the scene was not precisely taken in the way he wanted (Nader, 30).

Nader described the director as someone who is "devoid of humanity" even though he produces films that he portrays as humanitarian works. The film director himself was a former political prisoner. Much of the anger expressed by different interviewees had to do with the idea that they could find patterns of behavior coming from individuals who were previously oppressed by the state before arriving in Turkey which they perceive to be not that different from that of their oppressor. In his book *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups*, David (2014) delves into the notion of "internalized oppression" that is mostly connoted with postcolonial theory, dissecting its different aspects. The author highlights a number of manifestations of internalized oppression. The first possible consequence is self-fulfilling prophecies when oppressed people carry on negative stereotypes imposed upon them. Secondly, David elaborates on intra-group conflicts and divisions that start taking place as a result of this internalized oppression. Thirdly, the author explains that internalized oppression often leads to distrust, critique, and starry-eyed expectations from any potential leaders. Fourthly and finally, the writer brings up intra-group violence and self-destruction. David refers to Lipsky's (1987) definition, illustrating that internalized oppression is the "turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the…oppression of the (dominant) society" (David 2014, p.9). The broken trust was not only expressed in terms of anger towards the leadership of oppositional exiles but it was also felt towards popular figures and celebrities in Egypt. Ahmad, for instance, talked about his anger and conflictual emotions towards Mohamed Mounir who is a very famous Egyptian singer and actor. Ahmad recounted:

> At some point in time, I was a great fan of Mounir. He was much more than a singer. He was more like a big brother. His words were meaningful. His songs carried the texture and soul of Egypt. You can even smell them like cooked food. Eventually, I became aware of his political stances, and I felt offended on a personal level. This man used to sing truthful words! (Ahmad, 30).

When conversing with Amir, a 27 years-old artist, he revealed that he enjoys gluing together different sounds, and creating sound collages. The last sound collage he made with his close friend was titled "A Mix of What's Left of the Revolution" (2021). The collage is a ten-minute soundtrack composed of songs, poetry lines, political speeches, cheers of protests, movie lines, excerpts from TV shows, and speeches of public figures affiliated with the revolution. The soundtrack starts off with the 2011 resignation statement of the ousted president Hosni Mubarak followed by a series of distinctive sounds that carries bold memories in the collective consciousness from the years following the revolution. Amir illustrated that he has created more than ten similar collages, and he constantly takes the time to listen to them. I asked him about his feelings while listening to them. He explained that when these quite distinct voices and sounds are mixed up and come one after the other, his mind turns upside down, and the memories mess with his head. He narrated "perplexity…perplexity…perplexity…a state of being completely lost! What is this? What is all of this? Who is the liar? And, who is the hypocrite? I cannot accuse anyone for being wrong". After we finished our interview, I closed the audio recording to thank Amir for his precious time. Before leaving, Amir stopped me and asked if we can reopen the audio recording as there is one more thought he finds essential and wishes to share. Holding the audio recording near his mouth, Amir started narrating:

> There are many idols and symbols in our lives that got destroyed. Moreover, we started this journey of foreignness at a very early age. In Egypt, we were used to consulting the surrounding elders. Now, no one in our lives is trustworthy. We are all missing the character of the consultant. How can I rid myself of the painful prison memories? How can I end my struggle with the divisions between the Egyptian community here? No one is there to offer answers. So, we keep it all to ourselves and try to figure out a possible exit (Amir, 27).

Emotions of anger, mistrust, uncertainty, and skepticism toward figures and individuals affiliated with the revolution often added to the strong sense of disorientation that is already rooted in the condition of transition and liminality. These emotions also gradually cultivated a growing sense of indifference and a desire to withdraw from collective initiatives and abandon the political sphere, tendencies which I will elaborate on further in the following chapter.

3.5. Conclusion

In 2020, one of my interviewees who works as an actor and a storyteller released a short movie titled *Fasla* (Comma) (2020). The film features the main actor in different footage dressed in a casual hooded jacket while he walks around the city of Istanbul in a state of estrangement. In a narrative form, the lead character shares his thoughts about what it feels like to be an expatriate, the alienation that comes with exile and the role friends play in making the experience a little more bearable. In one of the scenes, the young man expresses "The thought of going to a far foreign place creates a weird feeling. You are always in a strange silence, daydreaming about a whole other place. Your body is here, but your soul is elsewhere" (Fasla 2020). While talking with the main actor, I asked him why they chose to name the film *Comma*. He explained that he perceives the entire phase post the involuntary departure as a comma in their lives.

> While there is a full stop that acutely ends a sentence, allowing for a new sentence to start, there is the comma which invites the past while giving it a new meaning. The full stop equates to death. Life is all about a series of commas and the experience of expatriation was definitely one of these commas (Nader 30).

What the young actor highlighted here is both the strong sense of estrangement and ambivalence that comes with living on a threshold and the potentialities that lie with it. During our conversation and while commenting on the short film, the actor emphasized that this movie is released at a time when most of the mainstream popular songs newly released and heavily consumed in Egypt highlight themes like the treachery of friends and distrust between people. On the contrary, the film they produced underlines values like magnanimity and honest friendships that are manifested in expatriation as he continued. What is quite thought-provoking is how his physical presence is in Istanbul while his absorption is deeply connected to the social as well as the cultural sphere in Egypt. The liminal condition that the film clearly reflects is also the predicament that gives birth to resistive artworks produced abroad that allows for an alternative to the prevailing cultural industry. McManus points out the potentialities inherited within affects of ambivalence, writing:

> While ambivalence is often characterized as paralyzing, I want, instead, to foreground its latent productivity so as to interrupt an affective politics in which hope is presumed to shape subversive agency while fear renders subjects complicit and governable…Affective ambivalence emphasizes room for agential maneuver, the possibility of 'depathologiz[ing]

> negative affects so that they can be seen as a possible resource for political action rather than as its antithesis,' (Cvetkovich, 2007: 460) (McManus 2011).

Ambivalence and unclarity were recurrent affects that many of my interlocutors expressed during our interviews. When asked to elaborate further about his emotions in the past seven years, Hasan illustrated "If I would depict my emotions in the years following the coup and my departure from Egypt in an artistic expression, it would come in the form of a calligraffiti painting with overlapping random letters that are neither clear nor understandable to the reader nor even to myself" (Hassan 25). In this chapter, I tried to unpack these emotions of perplexity and confusion through the lens of Turner's 'liminality' and Szakolczai's 'permanent liminality'. In the following and final chapter, I will be looking further into the potentialities that come with ambivalence which McManus emphasized, focusing on the affect of hope and exploring the different forms in which it appeared.

CHAPTER IV

GLIMMERS OF HOPE

Illustration 4.1. Author's Visit to the Concert Site

Source: Eslam Reda, @eslamredaun12

4.1. Introduction: 'And Hope Remains…'

On December 18, 2021, I attended a musical concert by an Egyptian singer called Mohamed Abbas (featured in figure 4). Abbas is a young Egyptian artist who is not so well-known in Egypt. He gained some popularity among the Islamist circles due to his active participation in different public events and his regular presence in the Rabaa al-Adawiya mosque sit-in. He used to sing on Rabaa's main stage, narrate the morning prayers and led the people in *taraweeh* prayers (special nightly prayers during the month of Ramadan) in the sit-in. Thereupon, his voice became a familiar part of the soundscape of the Rabaa al-Adawiya square. Abbas produced various musical pieces, most of which carried themes that are associated with the 2011 Revolution and the years following it. The concert took place in the Çınar Kongre Merkezi, a congress center located in the Başakşehir district. Başakşehir is a relatively new urban area that is a space of attraction to many Egyptian migrants belonging to medium and high-income groups. The neighborhood is a preferable residence choice for a number of

Egyptian migrants due to its conservative and Islamic atmosphere as well as its relatively uncongested nature and connectivity to the metro which makes movement around the city quite feasible (Elenany 2018). Accordingly, the choice of the concert place was quite understandable. The concert was sponsored by several companies founded by Egyptian migrant entrepreneurs most of which are real estate startups, media production companies, and an Egyptian seafood restaurant. The first two rows were reserved for the sponsors and some political and public anti-regime figures who regularly appear on Egyptian media platforms and channels broadcasting from Turkey.

With intense applause and crowd cheers, Abbas makes an entrance while singing his latest song "Khodny Ma3ak" which translates to "Take Me with You". Even though the song's pulse and the beat are relatively high, its lyrics feature a slightly melancholic theme in which he longs to go back to the beloved missed ones. The song embarks on themes like distance, expatriation, separation, waiting, and a longing for homecoming and reunion. The stage background features a panoramic image of the pyramids, symbolizing Egypt. Amidst the evening, Abbas started singing one of his earliest pieces "To who do I leave you?". This song was released before the eruption of the January 25 Revolution and became one of his most famous works. In July 2013, a YouTube video was uploaded featuring him while he sings it on stage in the Rabaa sit-in while affirming that no one shall leave the sit-in. The lyrics depict him while he asks Egypt which is represented as a woman: "To whom do I leave you? ". The gendered visualization of the nation and the feminization of Egypt, as Beth Baron fairly elaborates, is something common in popular culture and the public imagination of the homeland (Baron 2005, p.5). However, Egypt in this song is not portrayed as a mother figure which is the more prevailing visualization of the nation in most of the artworks. Contrariwise, it is illustrated as an unhappy young lady whom he intensely loves and cannot leave due to the responsibilities he owes to her. The recurring part of the song highlights individual agency and the role he has towards the nation as a savior and as the one chargeable for its wellbeing. The final lines of the refrain keep repeating "Who would be there for the impoverished? Who would be the obstacle to the corrupted?"

Abbas leaves the stage behind and continues singing while walking around the aroused audience. This was the only song in which he preferred to be in close proximity to the crowd. This was, also, the only moment during which I spotted a young lady in her

twenties shedding tears as she got turned on by the lyrics. Most of the other songs were not directly linked to the homeland except for the very last one which was “Mawtini” (My homeland). “Mawtini” is the national anthem of Iraq; however, it carries deeper cultural connotations. The song is usually associated with Palestine and the image of home in the Arab World in general. As Dan Rabinowitz (2005, p.1) depicts “written in the 1930s by Ibrahim Tukan, “Mawtini” has major emotional significance for every Palestinian and is second only to “Biladi Biladi” (My country, my country), the semiofficial Palestinian national anthem. As soon as the first sounds of “Mawtini” were heard, everyone fell silent and stood up” (Rabinowitz 2005, p.1). Calling it a night, the crowd at Abbas’s concert also stood up in full respect the moment he started singing “Mawtini”.

As much as it is valuable to analyze what was present, it is equally crucial to closely look at what was absent. Several of Abbas’ songs were not performed that evening. Most of his songs that carried gloomy themes and heavy-hearted associations were missing from that night. For instance, he released a song right after the Rabaa massacre titled “Don’t Let Them Break You”. The song’s clip featured quite intense and sensational footage and visuals from the massacre. Even though this song is among his very noted works, it was not included in the concert. He also has several musical pieces gifted to the martyrs and others on themes like exile, alienation, and expulsion that none of which were brought up. One of the attendees made eye contact with him and asked him out loud to sing a song called “Takadamo” which translates to “Step Forward”. The song has a vibrant tempo and its lyrics and graphics feature a call for direct action and protests. Abbas recognized the lady’s request, grinned and politely dismissed it, and started singing a song about the prophet. The selected list of songs mostly highlighted lighter tones and content that was either religious, nostalgic to the motherland, Arab nationalism-oriented, and general uplifting themes. He seemed to be avoiding pieces that trigger painful memories or songs that are distinctly revolutionary.

In the biography section of one of his Social Media accounts (Clubhouse), Abbas started defining himself, writing “I sang “To Whom do I Leave You?”, and then I traveled leaving her”. When juxtaposing the video of him singing this song as a protestor in the Rabaa sit-in with the spectacle of him singing it again eight years later

as an exiled artist walking around an audience most of which are political expatriates, one glimpses a display of defeat. Yet interestingly enough, he chose to title his 2021 concert "And Hope Remains" and distanced himself and his audience from most of his wounding and stirring melodies. In this chapter, I venture into the new spaces within which hope resides. The first section elaborates on the spatial potentialities associated with exile in general and with Turkey in particular. The second section focuses on subjectivity, becoming, and self-making as areas of possibility. In the third and last section, I take on the shift in perception and interest that many of my interlocutors expressed from a previous inclination towards a macro-level conceptualization of action to a more small-scale microscopic imagination of it.

4.2. Turkey as a Space of Potentiality

Following the unfolding of the post-2013 migration wave, Turkey received thousands of Egyptian expatriates many of which were Islamists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Expatriates found Turkey a fertile land for possible transnational activism and political engagement with their homeland. This spatial imagination of Turkey as a place for possibilities was the result of a number of reasons, the most important of which was the Turkish regime's recognizable support to the expatriates. As Shaimaa Magued illustrates, Turkey offered legal as well as financial assistance which allowed the expatriates to establish five 24/7 channels, namely *Mekameleen*, *Misr Al'n, Al Sharq, Raba', and Watan*. Broadcasted from Istanbul and viewed in Egypt, these channels opting for an anti-regime oppositional narrative worked as a mediator between the migrants and their motherland. Several Turkish state officials also showed public support to the expatriates (Magued 2018, p.488). Further, several Turkish political actors joined public rallies across various cities in Turkey that were against the Egyptian regime, condemning the Rabaa massacre and raising its sign.

Consequently, these critical stances declared by the Turkish state officials deteriorated the relationship between Turkey and Egypt which led to the banishment of the Turkish ambassador in Cairo. This deep-seated conflict between both regimes together with the ideological affinities between the MB and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) gave the Egyptian opposition in Turkey a chance to find a safe, sympathizing and supportive atmosphere where they can engage in transnational political action.

Last April, however, Turkey decided to assign a new ambassador to Cairo after almost nine years of leaving the diplomatic post devoid (Bardakçı 2022, p. 451). This recent slight improvement in the relationship between the two countries came at the expense of the opposition abroad. On April 29, one of the major opposing TV channels *Mekameleen* declared that it will be closing all its studios and will no longer broadcast from Turkey. "Some of the TV programs critical of the Egyptian government were also taken off the air" (Middle East Eye 2022). While doing my fieldwork, nonetheless, there was a visible Turkish presence in so many of the social events I attended as a participant observer. During the month of Ramadan, for instance, public *iftars* are known to be a chance for gathering and networking. I attended three different *iftars,* one of which was carried by the Egyptian student union in Turkey. The other was organized by the Egyptian Youth Forum in Turkey which is a youth organization aiming at empowering young Egyptians living in Turkey. The last one was the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) annual Ramadan *iftar*. In the three *iftars,* there was always a representative from the Turkish state either from the migration management or from the AKP who offered a speech, emphasizing support and possible future collaborative work.

The Turkish regime's patronage of the Egyptian political migrants was not the only reason why Turkey was imagined as a space of possibilities for the opposition abroad. Zeina, one of my interlocutors who works as a human rights researcher and who was forced to leave Egypt in 2014 residing in different countries until she finally settled down in Turkey three years ago, revealed to me that she carried some hope upon her arrival to Turkey. She illustrated "here is considered the place with the largest gathering of people who can do something together. This gave me a little bit of hope. Supposedly, these people have a common purpose that ties them together". With a sarcastic laugh, Zeina continued "when I came here, however, I eventually realized that the environment here is completely ill-suited. My belief in individual efforts got solidified; at least with individual work you get things done". Aside from Zeina's unmet expectations, disappointment, and retreat to individual effort (affects which I will deeply discuss later), Zeina emphasized the large number and the homogeneity of the group which in her imagination could have allowed for possible transformative collective action. Based on this image, many of the Egyptians in Istanbul took part in forming different coalitions upon arrival. In 2014, the Egyptian Revolutionary Council

(ERC) which is a coalition of groups that oppose the Egyptian state was formed. Four years later, the Association of Egyptian Journalists Abroad was also established. On the 11th of February, 2021 which marked the 10th anniversary of Mubarak's ouster, the Union of Egyptian National Forces Abroad was founded. Other institutions that were focused less on international lobbying, advocacy, and opposition and more on looking after the community of Egyptians in Istanbul were also formed. In 2017, for instance, the Association of the Egyptian Community in Turkey was lodged. Additionally, other youth organizations like the Egyptian Student Union and the Egyptian Youth Forum were also created to focus on supporting young Egyptians in Turkey. Antonio Negri discusses the relationship between the desire to revolt and the active organization of resistance. He uses the simile of a weightlifter to illustrate his conceptualization of this relation. Negri explains that "before the lifter raises the weights, he concentrates on the task and gathers all his or her strength in a pause" (De Cauwer 2021, p.194). Negri then "describes the construction of institutions as the concentration and tightening of the weightlifter's muscles that prevent the pause in the lifting from becoming an interruption" (De Cauwer 2021, p.196). When illustrating one of the reasons behind his decision to leave the country, Adam explained "Egypt has become a scorched earth. Every effort that accumulates on this firewood increases it in flames". Exile, in this context, allows for an opportunity for institution building and coalition formation, practices that are strictly prohibited in the current Egyptian public sphere.

Younger interlocutors in their 20s or early 30s appeared to be less interested in these coalitions, nonetheless. Still, they perceived Turkey as a space carrying numerous possibilities. One of my interviewees, Nader, illustrated that despite the tragedies that had led to leaving the homelands, he believed that this is a quite significant phase for the Arab World. This is because so many Arab young people from different countries who have been through similar struggles had found a common space in Turkey to deeply interact with one another. In the near future, this would eventually lead to a better understanding and harmony between Arabs according to him. Many of the younger interviewees were also dazzled by the level of diversity found in Istanbul. Three of them described Istanbul exactly in the same manner, illustrating that Istanbul has the capacity to offer you a space for whatever subjectivity you wish to construct. One of them expressed "Here is a space of freedom that allows you a chance to really

know who you are". They emphasized the capacity to become whatever you aspire for in this new spatiality. In the coming section, I will discuss further this notion of 'becoming' and its relation to finding potentialities.

4.3. Breaking Free of Forms: Becoming Otherwise

In their book *Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming*, João Biehl and Peter Locke write:

> ...Guattari's haunting image, a bird beating its beak against the window; it is a potentiality for becoming, for breaking free of forms, for sublimating the violence of forces both every-day and world-historical. This potential for sublimation needs social (even political) recognition. In Deleuze's vision, symptoms express a desire or life force trapped and twisted at an impasse, awaiting a chance to break through (Biehl and Locke 2017).

While doing my fieldwork, the theme of 'becoming' kept popping up in so many of the interviews. Constructing new selves appeared as a vivid interest to most of my interlocutors, particularly interviewees aged between twenty-five to thirty. Ahmad, a 30 years-old young man who was a participant in the January uprising and who had come to Turkey in 2016, revealed to me that when he decided to leave Egypt, one of his close friends advised him "Do not jump off the boat while it sinks". This is a commonly used idiom that emphasizes retreating from complex situations when you could have a role in resolving them. Ahmad's friend conceptualized leaving the country as an act of escape, withdrawal, and irresponsibility. Yet, Ahmad replied to his friend in defense of his decision, illustrating "The only way I can actually benefit the people of Egypt is to become something…to possess a value. As long as you are a mere dot, you won't be able to do anything. You have to be more than a dot". Unlike his friend, Ahmad visualized leaving as a headway to a sphere of potentialities closely tied to a process of self-making and to becoming something beyond a drop in the ocean. Using the exact words, Sana who is twenty-five years old also expressed a strong desire to invest in learning and working on herself. She elaborated "if I am abroad and have the chance to become something, I have to become something. For, I wish one day I would become a capable person". Sana referred back to 2011, illustrating that the major obstacle faced right after the revolution was the scarcity of qualified calibers. Interestingly enough, she highlighted an association between her

emotions towards the memory of the revolution and her own performance in her career life. Sana narrated:

> Last year, I was a fresh graduate. I was applying for so many jobs without a single acceptance even though my CV was quite sound. I applied for Masters in a mediocre university and I got rejected which was quite shocking for me. So, when the January anniversary came, I felt like we were torn out and I thought to myself 'If only the revolution had never happened!" This year, the anniversary is almost approaching. I am having a good job and am quite satisfied with my performance. I got accepted into two ranking universities in Europe. So, I have completely different emotions. I appreciate the hope the revolution gave us and the fact that it gave us something to challenge ourselves with (Sana, 25).

In this section, I will be focusing on the theme of "being/becoming" and its association with the affect of hope. In light of Gilles Deleuze's conceptualization of potentiality, I will be unpacking the different takes on becoming that my interlocutors proposed throughout the interviews. I argue that the closure of the public and political sphere in Egypt repeatedly aroused sentiments of defeat and helplessness that urged many of my interlocutors to search for potency and capability elsewhere. There were three aspects of becoming that appeared in the fieldwork. The first one is an impulse to "become something" which was usually brought up in reference to career advancement, success, possessing a form of material power, etc. The second constituent of becoming is the inclination towards "becoming normal" which touches upon their strong desire to break free from a trauma-oriented identity. The third and final one refers to a desire to shake loose of their old subjectivities and their past associations.

4.3.1. Becoming Something

When Sana underlined a sense of gratefulness to the memory of the revolution that allowed her hope and something to challenge herself with, she was touching upon a recurring theme that also appeared in other interviews, namely the recalling of an intense memory that enables a counter effect of pushing forward. Amir, a twenty-seven years old artist who was also forced to leave Egypt in 2015, disclosed to me that before his involuntary departure from the country, he was imprisoned for 11 months during which he got intensely tortured. Amir recalled the last interrogation he had during his detention. After being handcuffed, having his eyes covered and his body pinned to the ground, the police officer pointed his gun towards Amir's head, threatening "you are worth nothing but a single shot". Immediately afterward, the officer shot but the gun

cartridge was blank. Amir described that memory as the biggest moment of collapse and weakness he had ever experienced. However, he affirmed that the recapturing of that particular memory impelled him to try out so many challenging things in his everyday life. He elaborated that whenever he was assigned a task that he finds quite difficult, he would immediately flashback to that moment reminding himself that if he could survive that juncture, then he can surpass any other thing. He continued "because of some situations I had lived in that made me feel thoroughly weak, now I just want to win. Today, I appear robust; but in fact, I am just trying to make up for the deficiency I felt in times where I had no ruling, word, or opinion". Sana, who had lost her father during the Rabaa massacre expressed a similar desire. At the very beginning of the interview, she remarked "I am a hard worker; this is how I define myself. I don't like loss in general. Thereupon, I like challenges". Zeina also revealed an impulse quite similar to the idea of challenging oneself in the face of difficult daily duties. She is one of the founders of a legal institution that records cases of human rights violations happening in Egypt. Zeina told me that one of her colleagues in the institution once received a request to help a case that was hardly possible to resolve. He immediately replied that this task was beyond the foundation's capacity, not until he was instantly interrupted by Zeina who insisted that they could resolve it. She elaborated "I always have the feeling that I can do something. God granted me a mind, and if a case came my way, then I must have the ability to sort it out". Likewise, Ahmad was trying to put into words how he felt when he initially participated in the January revolution. He described it as a very high feeling that has no correspondence. Interestingly enough, he gave it a second thought. Then, he brought up the euphoria he feels with every moment of career success, detailing that perhaps this is the only emotion that can match the sentiments he felt during the 18 days of the revolution. Vatansever writes:

> Even in those cases, where emigration seems to be an individual choice, by somewhat forcing the person into choosing between the plague of an unwanted re-start abroad and the cholera of diverse forms of punishment at home, exile robs the individual of a great portion of his/her "capacity to have acted differently", i.e. agency (Giddens 1984)...But in the meantime, in a less trivial sense, encountering differences and different variations of the "self" under challenging conditions can potentially lead to a renewed sense of agency, i.e. to a re-subjectivation (Vatansever 2022, p.61).

Sentiments of agency that many of my interlocutors felt during their participation in street protests and which they have later on lost were often glimpsed again in their

working on the self and remolding new subjectivities as they explained in different manners

"Becoming something" was often expressed in terms of either career success or potency to handle quite challenging situations. In many of the interviews, this yearning for a new subjectivity that is more capable and less impotent was quite manifested. During the site visits, this tendency also appeared. In more than one speech during the Ramadan Iftars, it was expressed that one of the major motives behind establishing the Egyptian Youth Forum and the Egyptian Student Union is to produce calibers that possess remarkable strength in their fields. The "becoming something" impulse cannot be separated from the realm of the political, even though it seems to belong to a more personal sphere. In an online talk titled "Helplessness and Agency", the American psychologist Rick Hanson defined the word agency using a metaphor. He identified it as the feeling of "being more like a "hammer" and less like a "nail"" (Hanson 2019). In a similar vein, Firenze University Press released a book titled "Unpacking Political Agency: Equality, Vulnerability, Discrimination" in which Virginia Sanchini remarks "Basically, an agent is the one who is "capable to act"; meanwhile, "agency" means that capacity or, even, the expression of that capacity. In some detail, a political agent is the one who is "capable to act" politically: that is, someone who is capable of participating in a "common" exercise of political power" (Sanchini, 2019, p.11). With a tone full of pride, Amir disclosed that he still has some shirts covered in blood in his closet that he does not want to get rid of because these pieces remind him of his participation in the protests. He continued "I was present and aware during the January protests and the Rabaa sit-in. My hand moved a brick. I was influential". Similarly, Ahmad expressed that what made him feel that he has the potency to do something was the revolution. "We were able to overthrow Mubarak; it doesn't matter what happens afterward", he explained. The sensation of "being more like a hammer" that was once felt in the public domain and which became completely missing after the state's crackdown following the coup pushed many of my interlocutors to long for it elsewhere. "Being less like a nail" that Hanson brings up is nothing but a paraphrasing of Ahmad's strong desire to become "more than a dot". It is a craving for a sense of individual potency that was stripped of the political realm and that my interviewees came to find a partial substitution for it in dreaming of constructing new capable and successful selves.

4.3.2. Becoming Normal

In their article 'Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming', Biehl and Locke (2010) infer from their field research in post-war Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, recounting:

> Sarajevo is a city over-flowing with "symptoms" Years of trauma-oriented psycho-social projects have made psychiatric diagnostics—collective depression and post-traumatic stress—integral to common sense in BiH. Such clinical-sounding assessments have the effect of emphasizing damage over possibility, determination over flight, painting the city primarily in terms of its wounds (which are indeed deep and bleeding still) while disregarding the hopes and desires—and resistances to neoliberal economic forms—that pain also communicates (Biehl and Locke 2010, p. 319).

The desire to break free from a trauma-oriented self-definition was something I glimpsed in the narrative of some of my interlocutors. While carrying out a digital ethnography, I came across a Facebook post that Sana wrote one month after our interview. In that post, Sana revealed that one of the issues she has been sorely struggling with in the past years was the fact that she was always defined by her wound as being a daughter of a martyr. She uses the metaphor of the prison to depict her emotions towards that, illustrating that she has been trying so many times to emancipate herself from these categorizations. She continued that she has been trying to find a value for herself beyond a context of pain; still, all her trials had failed. And whenever she attempts to do so, her surroundings accuse her of forgetfulness and indifference. In a similar vein, Zeina who was a human rights researcher and whose father is a political detainee in Egypt expressed a resembling frustration. Zeina revealed to me that she once shared on her Facebook page a post about football that carried cheerful sentiments. Immediately afterward, she received several criticisms for it. She expressed that her surroundings are used to her being the detainee's daughter and the rights advocate who only shares painful occurrences, political news, state violations, and human rights-related content. When she shared content beyond these categories, she got accused of forgoing the cause. On the one hand, Zeina conveyed discontent towards this containment of her identity, stating "at the end of the day, I am also a human" (Zeina, 30). On the other hand, she revealed that she can hardly perform outside the boundaries of this identity either. She also felt a sense of discomfort whenever she shares content that is unrelated to this particular selfhood.

In their article "Devious silence: Refugee art, memory activism, and the un-speakability of loss among Syrians in Turkey", Chatzipanagiotidou and Murphy recount the story of "Arthere", a collective of displaced Syrian artists established in 2014 and based in Kadıköy, Istanbul. The authors illustrate that the artists there revealed a strong urge to break free from the category of 'refugee art' that constrains their identity and frames it only through the contours of their trauma. Jamal, one of the artists at "Arthere" clarifies "it is not an obligation for artists from Syria to respond artistically to what has been happening in Syria" (Chatzipanagiotidou and Murphy 2021, p. 474). Reclaiming an identity that surpasses the past and that does not fabricate itself in response to the condition of being exiled after experiencing trauma and defeat was an impulse vividly present in many of the interviews I carried out. Amir revealed to me that one of the significant internal battles he fought for so long was his attempt to convince himself that he is neither a victim nor a hero. Amir witnessed the Rabaa massacre together with incidents of street mass-murdering prior to it, got imprisoned, and was intensely tortured. After living these events and forcibly leaving Egypt, he constantly caught himself trapped in a victim/hero dichotomy when constructing his subjectivity. He clarified that his main concern was to paint a persona that escapes the sufferer/survivor split, demonstrating "I kept persuading myself that I am a normal human who can live normally". During his fieldwork with Palestinian families of the occupied West Bank who are suffering from settler colonialism, Mikko Joronen recounts that one of his interlocutors emphasized a strong rejection of the victim mentality, elaborating "Four things are important. Refusing to be a victim. Refusing to hate. Act that way of what we believe in, [and] not take nonviolent resistance as strategy, but a way-of-life" (Joronen 2017, p.96). The inclination to reclaim a "normality" that was hijacked and to redeem a subjectivity that is far off the trauma and that does not frame itself as a victim was constantly observed. When defining what "normality" is, Amir described it in relation to an understanding of time. He emphasized that his comprehension of time and the way life is structured was entirely different before the day of the massacre.

> Life was gradually unfolding. Year after year, it included feasts, Ramadan, family visits, etc. But after that day many immense things happened. But the most difficult of them was that I was shocked at how the rhythm of life had changed so much. My time stopped on that date. Deep inside, I always feel like I'll go back to that hour, and everything afterward will be erased and we'll continue as normal people. That will never happen nonetheless, he says.

Shaking loose from a subjectivity oriented by past wounds was not the only desire I glimpsed. In so many of the interviews I carried out, there was an urge to break free from responding to the Egyptian status quo altogether. Yet, this urge did not manifest itself as a state of complete indifference or unresponsiveness towards any political or social injustices.

4.3.3. Letting Go of the Ghost: Responding to Other Causes

Some of my interlocutors disconnected from Egypt but started to affiliate more with other causes like the Palestinian struggle. "My priorities have changed. Egypt is no longer a cause I am concerned with; Palestine, however, is still a cause I care about", Sana illustrated. Other interlocutors also expressed the same thing, emphasizing that they are trying their best to distance themselves from Egyptian politics. Three of the artists and actors I interviewed participate in drama works that feature aspects of the political conditions in Egypt like the issue of political detainees; nevertheless, they clarified that they do so only to earn a living not because they are engaged or convinced with the content. Amir worked as an art director in a drama series titled *Dungeon 55* that recounts the story of a group of political prisoners. When I initially asked Amir about the name of the series, he revealed that he had no idea, affirming that he perceived these projects as just an opportunity to work and thrive. Amir's father is still a political detainee. He recounted that the last time his father sent him a letter from his prison, it took him five days to be emotionally prepared to read that letter. He continued "I didn't want to open the letter. I don't want anything that reminds me of him right now. I am avoiding everything that relates to him". In a similar vein, he expressed that he is no longer responsive to any of the news. When he hears of the execution of several political prisoners, he feels numb and offers no reaction. He ended his words, stressing "My cause became the cause of Palestine". Likewise, Hassan who is a twenty-five-years-old artist and who was also a survivor of the massacre walks me step by step through the different stages of his becoming. He narrated "Hassan whom you're talking to is radically different from the person I was a few years ago…most of my beliefs had changed and might change. The only thing that remained unaffected was my strong connectedness to the Palestinian cause" (Hassan, 25). I asked him why is he still holding to that cause while letting go of other affiliations. In response to my inquiry, he depicted the Palestinian cause as a 'real' one unlike the political conditions

in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq which he described as a 'distraction'. For him, while the former is a blatant hijacking of land, the latter issues are "just us tormenting one another", he added. Hassan's shift in priorities and inclination to respond only to the Palestinian struggle could be perceived as an urge to break free from a cause loaded with painful personal memories and overwhelming as well as confusing events that feel like a distraction that is unworthy of a response.

The Palestinian cause was not the only matter that many of my interlocutors shifted their engagement towards. Nada told me that she was fascinated by one of her Uyghur friends who is constantly raising awareness about the violations the Chinese state commits against the Uyghur people. She elaborated that her friend's efforts and energy symbolized for her the peak of political action and inspired her to think of a cause to commit to. She continued "I thought to myself if my friend is raising awareness about what's happening in her country, for which cause should I dedicate my efforts?" She elaborated that she found herself quite dispassionate about Egypt, and she decided to devote herself to women's activism instead. The leaning toward a withdrawal from the Egyptian political realm which I glimpsed in the narratives of many of my interlocutors resembles the patterns of choices that Jessica Greenberg highlighted in her ethnographic work with young student activists in post-revolutionary Serbia. Greenberg clarifies that many of her young interlocutors showed a refrain from formal politics. She writes "It is typical of political coming-of-age narratives among the revolutionary generation of student activists in Serbia, in which an awareness of the complexities of the world is tied to…a rejection of formal politics" (Greenberg 2016, p. 35). Keeping distance from Egyptian politics and choosing disconnection over immersion is an attempt to "break away from prescribed routes restricting mobility" (Windsor 2015, p. 157), finding refuge in other territories that feels less paralyzing.

4.3.4. Becoming Otherwise: Conclusion

In an interview carried out in 1990 between Antonio Negri and Gilles Deleuze, Deleuze highlights:

> It's fashionable these days to condemn the horrors of revolution…they say revolutions turn out badly. But they're constantly confusing two different things, the way revolutions turn out historically and people's revolutionary becoming…Men's only hope lies in a revolutionary

> becoming: the only way of casting off their shame or responding to what is intolerable (Deleuze 1990).

While conversing with Amir, I asked what the word "change" means to him. He told me that the past seven years of his life have been based upon this word. He referred to the change that no one sees as a change in a belief or a change in a personal trait. Amir then revealed to me that he keeps a diary of his self-formation. A close friend of his who was also forced to leave the country after imprisonment advised him to keep a journal of his core beliefs and review it regularly. Amidst the conversation, Amir told me that he believes that he is still undergoing a process of formation and any thoughts he would share with me today could be changed by tomorrow. Amir's mindfulness of the process of his becoming takes us to Deleuze's investment in that concept. Deleuze shifts our attention from questions related to being and power and focuses instead on the notion of becoming.

Sotirin writes "For Deleuze, such questions fail to engage the constant unfolding of what is becoming and the vitalities, energies, and potentialities of a life" (Stivale 2014, p. 116). Deleuze distinguishes his conceptualization of society from that of Foucault. While Foucault's core concern is power and how it shapes subjectivities between a state of resistance or a state of docility, Deleuze perceives society through a conceptualization of departure. "For me…society is something that is constantly escaping in every direction…It flows monetarily, it flows ideologically. It is really made of lines of flight. So much so that the problem for a society is how to stop it from flowing. For me, the powers come later" (Deleuze 1990). Deleuze's train of thought offers an approach to subjectivity building that goes beyond the dichotomy of subjugation and resistance. When talking to my interlocutors, many of them touched upon this theme of becoming, but they were not necessarily framing the formation of their new selves through an imagination tied to resistance. In Deleuze's conversation with Negri, he references Charles Peguy's proposition that we could recognize events in two distinct ways. The first is to fathom events historically, how an event comes to being and how it unfolds. The second approach is "to go back into the event, to take one's place in it as in a becoming, to grow both young and old in it at once, going through all its components or singularities" (Deleuze 1990). In this section, I attempted to portray a snippet of how my interlocutors have grown young and old in events prior to their departure from Egypt. The urge to become otherwise manifested itself in a

desire to become something, pertaining to hard work and career success. This impulse also came in the form of wishing to reclaim normality and disassociating from Egyptian politics altogether. The three urges have something in common which is a strong desire to leap away from constraining spheres that are deeply connected to affects of disappointment, failure, and defeat.

This pattern of withdrawal in the form of a new becoming can be understood in the light of Deleuze's line of flight. Both Deleuze and Guattari offer a triad of lines through which we can imagine society. The first set of lines is molar lines which could resemble chess pieces in which the identity of each piece determines the capacity of its movement. This could relate to how one of my interlocutors, Hassan, explained that he is constantly trying his best to avoid engaging with the Egyptian news, but he also constantly fails in doing so as he is an Egyptian at the end of the day. He illustrated that even when he tried to escape thinking of Egypt, he was instantly offered a chance to work on an Egyptian film that immersed him again in so many details related to the country. Then secondly comes the molecular lines which are like draughts pieces in which the changing relationship between the pieces is what defines the movements not the identity of the piece. To clarify the molecular lines further, Windsor refers to "micro-political interactions and alliances that inaugurate transformative shifts in subjectivities, swelling to a point where they might saturate institutional structures" (Windsor 2015, p. 161). The third and final set of lines is the lines of flight which pertain to a conclusive pull-out. The 'revolutionary becoming' that Deleuze alludes to becomes tangible in my interlocutors' tendency to pull out from a past subjectivity that seems to be impotent, injured by major traumatic events, and constrained within the frame of a particular cause that is becoming too heavy to handle.

4.4. From the Earthquake to the Palm Shoot

The symposium was almost ending, and it was finally the time for the Q&A session. A retired old Egyptian man seated in the front row immediately raised his hand to throw off a seemingly offending question. This symposium was part of the Istanbul International Book Fair, a major annual Arabic book fair that has been held for the past six years. The fair features plenty of Arabic publishing houses together with diverse initiatives created by Arab migrants living in Istanbul. This particular panel discussion

offered a talk titled “Research Centers’ Identity and their Role in Awareness and Political Change” which was delivered by a relatively famous Egyptian political scientist, who is anonymized in the thesis as my interlocutor, and carried by the Egyptian Institute for Studies, an institute established in 2014 and based in Istanbul. Throughout the talk, the retired old man seemed very skeptical and unconvinced. Once the floor was opened for the audience to offer their comments, he instantly took the advantage of that to let go of his critical concerns. He started his words with an initial apology for what he is about to say. He then continued:

> With all my due respect to your efforts, the role of research centers when it comes to the Egyptian current situation is quite inefficient. The present Egyptian reality requires a ‘shake’ I would like to say ‘an earthquake’, but the word is strong and might imply a destructive connotation which is not my intention. Thus, I would rather say that we need a “shock” that shackles our reality, and this is your role. I am a feeble citizen. I am incapable. I have already retired, and my role in life has come to an end.

With a still tone of voice blending firmness with discouragement, the academician replied to him, asserting “I am a proponent of ‘the seed theory’”. He was referencing a famous hadith that offers “If the Hour starts to happen and in the hand of one of you is a palm shoot or seedling; then if he’s able to plant it before the Hour happens, then let him plant it”. The professor, then, continued his words emphasizing the significance of interfering with whatever possible microscopic action available at hand regardless of its efficiency and influence. He added, “This is the only craft we have been doing. This is what we are capable of. What else can we do?”. In this section, I will be exploring further what the academician depicted as the ‘palm shoot theory”. I argue that many of my interlocutors refrained from conceptualizing change on a macro-level and acquired an inclination toward microscopic transformative action in the spheres they are more capable of.

4.4.1. “A Multitude of Small Bonds”

While interviewing Sana, she expressed a sense of deep frustration towards the younger version of herself that used to aspire for a macro-level change, depicting that past self as naive. She illustrated that she currently has a dream to establish an NGO that aims at supporting Arab women to continue their lifelong journeys of education. She continued “In the past, I wanted to emancipate the world without any clear vision of how to do so. Now, this NGO has become my only dream”. In a similar vein, Zeina

who is one of the founders of an international human rights organization that records cases of political arrest told me that despite the major efforts she and her colleagues in the institution put in, they cannot help in releasing any of the political prisoners. However, what kept her moving forward is the fact that their pressure and advocacy sometimes help slightly in enhancing the conditions of the detainees in jail. Many of my interlocutors expressed a tendency to isolate themselves from any coalitions or collective initiatives carried out by Egyptians in Istanbul. Jamila, for instance, revealed that she gradually stopped attending any weddings and is only attending funerals of people she closely knows to avoid interacting with the circles of Egyptians here. Adam, who is pursuing his graduate studies while working as a researcher also expressed the same tendency to keep a distance from gatherings of Egyptians in Istanbul and narrow his circles to his work and university colleagues. Zeina, also, revealed that she was about to rent an apartment in a gated community not until she figured out that this compound has so many Egyptian residents which made her refrain from that decision and search for a residence elsewhere. She elaborated that upon her arrival to Turkey, she was keener to attend meetings and assemblages of different coalitions and initiatives, but she gradually became disinterested in these arrangements. She said:

> I joined so many meetings and workshops until I realized they had too little outcome. People are not pure towards each other, and everyone thinks he knows best. Some people genuinely want to help but they are doing it the wrong way which leads to more negative results. Now, I am more convinced with individual work or efforts carried out by groups with a limited number of people.

Likewise, Amir clarified that he lost his desire to get involved in any collectivity, illustrating that he is drained and he had gotten enough of the disagreements occurring in the different circles. He added that now his perception of action had changed; it became mainly focused on interpersonal interactions within the smaller surrounding circles. “Dramatic action is something I will no longer seek unless it comes my way. To make someone I know happier became my manifestation of what action is”, he added. Hassan and Nader also shared the same inclination. Hassan clarified that whenever the question of “what should be done?” visits his mind, he instantly thinks of how he can make life easier for individuals in his circles like helping a friend find a job or teaching someone a skill he can earn money with. Furthermore, Nader explained “What is more important than advocating for a cause is to be a good

representative of that cause. Just stick to the beliefs you are calling for and set a good example for others. You will at least succeed in influencing the folks surrounding you". The movement toward small-scale action is similar to what Lévi-Strauss refers to as "tiny solidarities" (Biehl and Locke 2010, p.333). Lévi-Strauss depicts these solidarities, writing:

> …the multitude of small bonds, of tiny solidarities that prevent the individual from being ground down by the overall society and the latter from being pulverized into anonymous and interchangeable atoms. These links integrate each person into a mode of life, a home ground, a tradition, a form of belief or of unbelief, which not only balance one another like Montesquieu's separate powers but constitute so many counter-forces capable of acting together against abuses of political power (Levi-Strauss 1983, p. 287).

Biehl and Locke also unpack the same idea in light of their fieldwork with *Wings of Hope* (2010). *Wings* is an NGO based in Sarajevo that offers psychosocial aid to children and teenagers. The authors wrote that "For the staff of Wings and their beneficiaries, healing the wounds of war is in itself socio-political rather than simply individual, accomplished less through personal therapeutics and processing of painful memories than through a small-scale, tentative restoration of ties of trust and support" (Biehl and Locke 2010, p. 334). The authors elaborate on how the NGO manifests a space that defies the external reality of corruption by offering an alternative microscopic reality that is free from bribery and injustices. The "theory of the palm shoot" as the academician named it or the tendency to seek potentiality within the minor spheres was again brought up when Amir revealed to me that he keeps an agenda that he calls the "Heritage". He recited:

> It was Nour's idea. He told me we shall eventually forget. Keep a record. Write everything. No one will watch or listen to your story. They will watch *Al Ikhtiyar* (The Choice). But at least when you pass away and a document endures in your drawer, they shall think you were honest and start reading what you recounted. Your family will read and so will your friends. Ever Since he brought up this idea, we sit together, recall memories from our imprisonment, audio-record them and transcribe everything later in that diary we title "The Heritage".

Al Ikhtiyar (*The Choice*, 2021) is a state-sponsored drama series streamed every Ramadan in an attempt to narrate the historical events following the military takeover in 2013 from the regime's point of view. Despite Amir's awareness of the significance of producing counter narratives and despite his contribution to a drama series that is being filmed in Istanbul to fulfill that purpose, he does not see so much hope in these initiatives. Nonetheless, he firmly believed in the hidden potentiality lying within

recording his own story even if it will remain shelved and unpublished until his death. Amir was aware of the kind of legitimacy a story carries when found after its author's death instead of published in his life. He was also attentive to the fact that a diary of a dead individual can hardly be stigmatized or dismissed unlike a group project carried out by an assemblage of exiles whose work will instantly be stigmatized as a bearer of a malicious foreign agenda upon its release. Refraining from the macro to the micro and the tendency to break free from a collective, retreating to the intimate is not only a sign of disappointment towards chaotic and conflictual interactions within the collective effort. It is also a longing for a recognition that escapes a particular image imposed upon the exiles and that strips their efforts from their potentialities.

4.4.2. Birth: Beginning Anew

Over a cup of coffee and a warm breakfast in one of Fatih's cozy coffee houses, Jamila revealed to me that she is pregnant with her second child, whom she plans to name after Asmaa El-Beltagy. Jamila recounted that Asmaa was her neighbor and one of her closest friends. Asmaa was murdered in the massacre, and Jamila was forced to leave the country two years later as she was informed that she is wanted for arrest. Jamila, a twenty-six years old young woman, arrived in Turkey in 2015. In Egypt, she was studying Mass Communication. When she departed for Turkey; however, she decided to change her major and study Political Science instead while working as a contributor writer on several platforms. She used to write about the stories of political prisoners and their families. Later, Jamila decided to completely withdraw from the field of politics, media, and writing. Instead, she shifted her career and started investing her time in studying parenting and positive discipline education. She expressed that she regularly thinks that this was the only decision she took that was not a reaction to any external pressures. With a gloomy tone, Jamila illustrated that she believes that the political conflict in Egypt would not be resolved unless a miracle happens. I brought up several emotions and asked Jamila to recall situations during which she intensely felt these emotions. When I mentioned "hope", she unhesitatingly replied "For me, hope is Harun". Harun is Jamila's first child who is around three years old. She emphasizes that Harun was the inspiration for her to change her career path and that he is her only source of hope. Compellingly, Zeina offered a quite similar response to the same question. She revealed that one of the remarkable and rare occasions in which

she felt hopeful was the moment she saw her brother's newly born girl. She detailed that she was the first to hold her. The theme of birth was again aroused during my interview with Ahmad. After a loaded silence, Ahmad sighed in melancholy and unveiled his emotions towards the memory of the revolution using the metaphor of birth. He illustrated that he has a tight bond with the ambiance he lived in when he participated in the revolution. He depicted "it's like when someone gives birth to a child. Then, this child dies, and you can hardly see any hope of begetting another one. It is not about the child; it's about the feeling of fatherhood which you've lost…an unparalleled feeling". In her book *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt draws an inherent connection between action and birth. First, Arendt makes a distinction between the three human activities, namely labor, work, and action. Labor is essential for sustaining biological life and offering the necessities for survival. Cooking, for instance, would be categorized as an act of laboring. Work, on the other side, is the activity that "creates an enduring human artifice that outlasts the ever-perishing natural world" (Arendt 2013, p.138). Finally, she brings up action which she conceptualizes as the human activity central to politics. Action, for Arendt, is haphazard, unpredictable, cannot be undone, and can only occur among the plural of distinct individuals. Unlike work and labor that can be produced in solitude, action manifests itself solely among a collective. Strikingly, Arendt moves to associate action with natality. She writes:

> However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, maybe the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought (Arendt 2013, p.9).

In his book *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Giorgio Agamben draws a similar correspondence between natality and potentiality. Agamben quotes Deleuze as he writes "The smallest infants are traversed by an immanent life that is pure potentiality [pure puissance]" (Agamben and Heller-Roazen 1999, p.230). During my interview with Ahmad, he told me that he participated in the 18 days of the January revolution; yet, he did not take part in the Rabaa sit-in. Nevertheless, he rejoined the street protests after the massacre. When I asked Ahmad to compare his emotions while demonstrating in January to his feelings while joining the protests condemning the

massacre two years later, he responded "the former evokes sentiments of life while the latter elicits an emotion of death. Do not tell me I am alive; for I am not. Freedom is life. I am living while being disturbed, scared, anxious and strangled" (Ahmad, 30).

In 2003, Achille Mbembe published an article in which he introduced the concept of 'Necropolitics' to "account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003, p.40). Mbembe was responding to Foucault's concept of biopolitics. In his book *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault argues that a historical transformation had occurred in the late 18th century in which the public ritualization of death had disappeared. Executions and states' slaughtering became largely absent from the public sphere. Biopower, which refers to the states' subjugations of bodies through variant technologies, emerged instead (Foucault and Ewald 2003). Mbembe shows his skepticism regarding that proposition. He does not negate biopolitics; however, he offers numerous examples from our contemporary moment that affirm death's remaining vivid presence in the public sphere. The Rabaa massacre resembled the peak of street violence and a striking reappearing of mass death in front of the public eye. Ahmad's recalling of the protests following it and the sentiments of death he strongly felt is a manifestation of Mbembe's necro politics, a situation in which the political arena became affiliated with a constant fear of death and a full realization that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides…in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003, p.11).

When I asked Nader for an interview, he chose for us to meet in a coffeehouse that was recently opened by young Egyptian men. Amidst our conversation, Nader looked around and revealed that the people of this place allow him so much hope; for, these are the people whose most of their thinking is about creating something new instead of recalling the past and its conflicts. The impulse to create is similar to the urge for giving birth and is no different from the drive to plant a palm shoot on a doomsday. What is common among the three is the inclination to bring a life into a field of death with all the unpredictable potentialities it may carry within it.

4.5. Conclusion

“I am never going back to Egypt. My return will either be the return of a visitor or the return of a rebel in case a revolution breaks out again, and I am anticipating the latter. I have a strong feeling that it is imminent”. This was the reply of one of my interlocutors when I asked him if he plans to go back to Egypt if he had the chance. When I started my fieldwork, hope was the affect I least expected to find or address. Disenchantment, dullness, and helplessness seemed to be vividly floating on the surface. When digging deeper, however, one could not dismiss the presence of hope nor detach it from other sentiments that are deemed negative. The covert hope here has its own agency. Ahmad illustrated to me that his recollection of the revolution constantly gives him the feeling that the better is yet to come. He then paused for a few seconds to add that this might be a ‘false hope’. Even if it was a ‘fond illusion’, this idea keeps pushing him forward as he clarifies. The affect of hope can hardly be discussed without an unpacking of the concept of potentiality. Agamben defines potentiality as the presence of an absence, asserting that the potential should stay unactualized to possess an agency (De Cauwer 2021, p. 187). The recapture of the revolution belongs to both spheres of the “no longer” and the “not yet”. In both cases, it belongs to an absence. Still, this absence has its influence in the present and in the fabric of the “every-day” in my interlocutors’ new lives in exile. At the very beginning of my interview with Zeina, she described herself as being a very pragmatic person. Zeina is turning thirty. During our conversation, she told me that when she looks back in time, she feels that the past ten years and the best days of her life were hijacked from her and she felt estranged from those years. The two hours of the interview were loaded with emotions of guilt, frustration, and bewilderment. Yet towards the end of the interview, she revealed that she often hears some people ask “what’s the significance of recording cases of violations in Egypt?” She reflects on what she’s doing, affirming “we record because I have a faith that a day will come and those people will be held accountable”. Zeina shared a recent self-portrait on Facebook in which she looks far away with her wide green eyes, captioning it “hoping not to lose hope”. Christopher Lasch writes “the worst is always what the hopeful are prepared for. Their trust in life would not be worth much if it had not survived disappointments in the past, which the knowledge that the future holds further disappointments demonstrates the continuing need for hope’’ (Lasch 1991, p. 81). Hope here is melded

with other gloomy emotions that nuance and complicate our understanding of it. In his piece “Hope in Hebron: The Political Affects of Activism in a Strangled City”, Mark Griffiths traces the story of a Palestinian activist called Nidal who carries regular political tours around the city of Hebron to allow foreigners to live the emotional experience of being under occupation. Griffiths asks Nidal whether he holds hope; he responds that they have no choice but to hope. Griffiths illustrates further the relationship between hope and fear, writing “fear is not a pathology to be feared in a project of sustaining hope, it is instead the very affect that mobilizes critical or radical forms of hope and, in turn, animates resistance to oppressive impositions of power” (Griffiths 2017, p.631). Similarly, Susan McManus argues against the assumption that fear produces paralysis and complicity while hope yields agency (McManus 2011). Both authors highlight the productivity of fear and its role in cultivating hope. Within the context of exile, fear is not necessarily the prevailing emotion, for the body had already fled the regime’s control. Other negatively perceived affects like detachment, nostalgia, alienation, etc. prevail instead. The presence of these sentiments, however, does not negate the existence of hope. The chapter’s opening vignette features Abbas while he sings with a background having the words “And, Hope Remains”. This chapter was an attempt to answer the question that automatically follows: if “hope remains” as suggested in the concert’s title, then to which spheres did the remainders/glimmers of hope go?

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

In mid-2019, a group of Egyptian exiled artists in Istanbul released a drama series titled *Winter 2016* (2019). The series traces the story of a small group of Egyptians from diverse backgrounds who were forced to flee the country due to their opposing stances on the regime. Banned from legal traveling, the group was left with no other choice but to escape illegally through the Sudanese borders. The whole thirty episodes reveal the nuances of this harsh journey from its very beginning to the moment they managed to cross the borders successfully. Prof. Amin, one of my interlocutors, told me that experiencing this journey was the worst experience he had ever been through in his sixty years of living. I referred to the drama series and asked him if it succeeded in adequately featuring this experience. With an unmoved face and a discouraged spirit, he replied illustrating that it was not anywhere close to what he had witnessed. The drama series ends with a scene of the fugitive group in a car finally crossing the country's borders. One of them was documenting the entire journey in a memoir; so, he asked each of his fellows to write down a final line or two in this diary. He, then, threw it from the car's window, asserting that this story has to remain in Egypt (Aboulftoh 2019). Just as in Le Guin's short story, the narrative ends at this point and the viewer never penetrates the lives of the ones who walk away afterward and whether they managed to leave behind a memory in a memoir or they started a new life while carrying its remnants.

After offering an expansive description of the post-2013 migration wave, Hamzawy and Dunne end their piece wondering:

> More than seven years after the January revolution, five years after the military coup, and with repression continuing to deepen inside the country, Egyptians in political exile now face painful choices. Will they give up on their dreams for a freer Egypt and build permanent lives in exile? Will they remain engaged, watching for signs of a potential new opening, or even step outside their siloes and work together to offer an alternative vision for their home country? All of these choices offer certain comforts and bear certain costs (Hamzawy, 2019).

In this ethnography, I attempted to investigate the emotions around these questions. I largely focused on two particular aspects. The first of which was the level and form of engagement with the political sphere in Egypt from exile. The other major question was about understanding the current emotions of Egyptian political migrants in Istanbul towards past memories preceding the exile and what these emotions can do in terms of guiding behaviors and choices of engagement or disengagement. In the introductory chapter of this ethnography, I attempted to present a comprehensive contextualization of the post-2013 politically-motivated migration wave so that the reader can fathom the larger picture when engaging with the discussions on the fieldwork later on.

In her article "A "Time out of Time": Tahrir, the Political and the Imaginary in the context of the January 25th Revolution in Egypt", Hanan Sabea writes:

> A "Time out of Time" is about excising a slice of time out of the rhythm of the familiar (the ordinary and the known) and, through that rupture (and an assumption of reconstitution), making it possible to imagine other modalities of being- in this case the political and the social (Sabea 2013).

Building on Sabea's depiction of the revolution as a "time out of time", I argue that this "slice of time out of the rhythm of the familiar" (Sabea 2013) gave rise to distinct individuals' subjectivities constructed in response to this historical moment. The "rupture", then, comes in two forms, namely the miscarriage of the uprising attempt with the stream of violence and violations accompanying that and the exile experience afterward. Finally comes a process of "reconstitution" or the imagining of "other modalities of being" (Sabea 2013) that occurs both on a collective as well as individual level. The recalling of the "Time out of Time" and its constant phantomic arousal in the new sphere of exile that shatters both the sense of time and space is what I focus on in the first chapter of this ethnography, arguing that all of my interlocutors were regularly struggling with a feeling of being haunted by the past. The "rupture" of defeat and banishment, however, creates emotions of ambiguity, mistrust, and a state of prolonged liminality within which occurs an internal struggle of not knowing how to respond to those phantoms. The final chapter deals with the individuals' attempts to reconstitute that rupture. I argue that while many of the Egyptian expatriates initially imagined Turkey as a space for possible transnational collective political action

focusing on the media and the creation of political coalitions abroad, a good number of them eventually started shying away from the realm of the Egyptian political sphere, perceiving action alternatively and imagining other ways for reconstituting that rupture.

In the first chapter, I looked at the presence of absences in all of its subtleties and forms in light of Derrida's concept of "hauntology". The first section discussed what hauntology is, its various meanings, and how it relates to this study. I argued that many of my interlocutors are perpetually haunted by memories preceding their departure and the ghost of the unfulfilled aspirations of the Arab Spring. While exile is substantially a physical separation of the subject from the Egyptian public space, I suggested that there were three additional spheres—namely, parts of the urban landscape in Istanbul, the digital, and the artistic spaces—that frequently aroused phantoms of the past and connected the expatriates back to Egypt. In the artistic realm, some of them re-experience the sorrow of being forced to leave the country again while also discovering a means of escaping their reality and generating new meanings. In the second section, I focused on the emotion of nostalgia and showed how it appeared in various contexts. Nostalgia, in this ethnography and in accordance with my interlocutors' words, was most of the time connoted with anguish and potentiality rather than a pleasant romanticization of either Egypt or the revolution. In the final section, I also looked at the affect of guilt and how it relates to "hauntology", arguing that many of my interlocutors showed condemnation either of their selves or of the collective of political migrants and political opposition in exile.

In the second chapter, I explored the areas straddling the present and the future in the second chapter. I investigated the ambivalence that my interlocutors felt in light of Victor Turner's theory of liminality (1967) and Árpád Szakolczai's permanent liminality (2016). In the first section, I looked into the history of the concept and how it ties to the feelings and experiences of my interlocutors. In the second section, I examined ambiguous and liminal emotions in relation to the creation of new subjectivities in exile. I focused on the emotions of mistrust, distrust, and suspicion that many of my interlocutors have against individuals who are in charge of the majority of the oppositional initiatives that are being conducted from exile in the third and final section. I argued that liminality frequently manifested itself in several ways,

the first of which was uncertainty over whether to remember and cling to previous ghosts while developing a subjectivity in response to them or to let go of these specters. Liminality also appeared as experiencing emotions of both interest and disinterest in Egypt.

In the third and final chapter, I explored the areas where hope resides and thrives. In the first section, I looked into the geographical potentialities associated with exile in general and Turkey in particular. Subjectivity, becoming, and self-making as potential domains are the main topics of the second section. I claimed that the closing of Egypt's political and public sphere continually sparked feelings of hopelessness and defeat, which compelled many of my interlocutors to look for strength and capability elsewhere. In the fieldwork, three characteristics of becoming were evident. The first one is the desire to "become something," which was typically mentioned in relation to professional development, success, holding some sort of material power, etc. The second aspect of becoming is the impulse to "become normal," which speaks to their intense desire to rid themselves of an identity that is trauma-oriented. The third and last one is about wanting to let go of their previous subjectivities and affiliations. In the third and final section, I discussed the change in perception and interest that many of my interviewees had previously revealed when they modified their pursuits from a macro-level to a more microscopic, small-scale vision of action. I claimed that many of my interlocutors avoided thinking about change on a large scale and developed a preference for microscopic transformational activity in the domains in which they excelled.

This research endeavor has its limitations, the first of which is the insufficient sample size. Due to time constraints, I could only carry out 15 in-depth semi-structured interviews which made the overall sample relatively small. Conducting more interviews would allow for more representative insights into the matter. Secondly, the inadequacy of prior research on the post-2013 politically-motivated migration wave made it more challenging to venture into the subject, review, and engage with wide-ranging literature. Very limited anthropological/ethnographical and sociological academic literature is available on the growing Egyptian diaspora over the last decade in general and on the expanding Egyptian communities in Turkey that have migrated largely as a result of political circumstances in particular. Thirdly, the insider

perspective and positionality that I possessed as a researcher allowed me smooth access to the community I am working with. However, it was also quite demanding for me to keep a sentimental distance from the topic I am working on throughout the process.

Fourthly, four of my interlocutors have been part of two overlapping exodus waves, that's why it was significant for me to historically and contextually situate the post-2013 wave in relation to the other preceding ones in the recent history of Egypt. For instance, Anas, Hassan, Jamila, and Nada were born and raised abroad due to their parents' economically-motivated emigration long before the revolution in 2011. Yet, they regularly spent the summer season with their extended families in Egypt and they lived in the country a few years after the revolution before they were forced to leave again after 2013 and could not return back since their departure because of their political participation in the protests. Individuals of what I depict as the "double exodus" have to be differentiated from their counterparts that were raised in the country, and thus shared slightly distinguished emotions. I did not delve much into this detail, as I focused more on the common emotions shared between both groups. Yet, it would be helpful to bear that distinction in mind for future research, as it would allow for insightful comparisons.

Due to the fact that the field is understudied, there is a wide range of areas and aspects that remain unexplored. Among these areas are the growing sub-communities within the Egyptian exiles in Turkey. Almost ten years have passed since the beginning of this migration wave in 2013. As I have previously mentioned, the media sector was one of the earliest and major spheres that many Egyptian migrants promptly took part in as a result of the opposing TV channels that were instantly established. Over time, many young Egyptian exiles who have acquired skills in this field started forming other smaller artistic initiatives, coalitions, media and film production houses, etc. that are worth exploring. Looking at the relationship and intersection between arts, affects, politics and the construction of subjectivities in exile would be a fertile area to investigate deeper. Besides, other sub-communities emerged quite recently and are attempting to display identity and discourse around themselves that is distant from politics. Just to name a few, the Association of the Egyptian Community in Turkey (2017), the Egyptian Youth Association in Istanbul (2022), and the Egyptian Student

Union in Turkey (2022). These subgroups are different from one another and are worth exploring each on its own. In this ethnographic study, all my interlocutors were Egyptian political migrants. I did not carry out any interviews with Turkish representatives who are in regular and close contact with diverse Egyptian communities in Turkey. As I have brought up earlier, almost in each side visit during the fieldwork, there were always several Turkish representatives that are affiliated with different state institutions, delivering public speeches that are worth analyzing to understand further the nature of the relationship between the host and the expatriates. Besides, "class" and "religion" were not among the categories and keywords I chose to focus on in this study; yet, it would be productive to consider these aspects for future research. For instance, the role socioeconomic class plays in influencing the affective experience of expatriation is significant to look deeper into. Younger interlocutors who were forced to leave the country in the company of no family members were regularly referring to a state of precarity and financial insecurity that escalated sentiments of estrangement. "Class" also could be investigated in relation to an altered situation in which many Egyptian expatriates coming from diverse provinces and social stratifications in Egypt were able to interact closely with one another. This intermingling between expatriates from different backgrounds that was not enabled on a deeper scale before leaving Egypt gave rise to both new potentialities yet also led to discomfort and disharmony in other cases. Lastly, the intersection between politically-motivated and religiously-motivated migration appeared once in the field. One of my interlocutors, Fatimah who is a single housewife in her 50s, self-identified as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. But, Fatimah also explained that before the January revolution in 2011, she was an Egyptian Coptic Christian who converted to Islam and was regularly threatened by both her family and the church. She took part in street activism and joined the Muslim Brothers in the years following the revolution. Fatimah clarified that while she was attempting to change her Christian name on her national identity card following the coup, a police officer openly advised her to leave the country or else he cannot guarantee her safety (Fatimah, 55). Fatimah's uncommon case again complicates a general assumption that perceives the Egyptian expatriates in Turkey as one homogeneous group, dismissing the nuanced differences within this community. Thus, bearing in mind aspects of religion and class might allow for further discussions and insights into the field.

This ethnographic study contributes to the quite scarce and recent literature on the Egyptian post-2013 politically motivated migration wave. As I previously mentioned, most of the literature on this exodus largely focuses on transnational and exiled activism. Therefore, there are other dimensions of this migration wave that are still quite understudied. This study also contributes to the literature on affectivity and the long-term impact of the Arab Spring on its participants and individuals who took part in it.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LIST OF INTERLOCUTORS

Name	**Age**	**Sex**	**Profession**
Hassan	25	Male	Art Director
Amir	27	Male	Art Director
Zeina	30	Female	Human Rights Researcher
Jamila	27	Female	Educator
Prof. Amin	68	Male	Academician
Ahmad	30	Male	Actor
Nader	30	Male	Actor/Storyteller
Anas	20	Male	University Student
Nada	20	Female	University Student
Fatima	55	Female	Housewife
Sana	25	Female	Communication Specialist
Suhaila	28	Female	Video Journalist
Adam	28	Male	Author/Researcher
Jamal	60	Male	Actor
Salma	33	Female	Graduate Student

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I.Subjectivity

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How do you describe yourself in your social media biographies?
3. It is often said that you can glimpse the story of a country or a nation through the story of a person. Can you describe to me the political circumstances of your country in the past few years, and what were your reactions to the situation?
4. Tell me more about your feelings during those years
5. Were these feelings also shared by people around you? What were the major feelings they were experiencing?
6. How do you feel now?
7. Are there any songs or artistic forms of expression that describe your feelings now or through the past few years?

II. Political Engagement

1. Speaking of "actions" and "change", what do these two words mean to you; how would you define them? Did you always think of them that way? Or did your idea of action and change differ? How?
2. What is politics for you? How would you define it?
3. Which political or public issues trigger you the most?
4. According to you, what is the ideal way to react to these issues?
5. Did your idea of the "ideal reaction" to these issues changed over time? How?

III. Digital Forms of Expression

1. Which digital platforms do you use? Do you engage with political or public issues on any of these platforms?
2. When you look back into Facebook memories, Instagram archives, or Twitter's old posts, do you find yourself engaging differently with public and political issues? How?

IV. Leaving & Expatriation

1. What does Istanbul mean to you? What are your emotions towards leaving?

2. Did migrating affect your responsiveness and involvement in politics? How?

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