Living and dying with the state: The Netherlands according to Egyptians in Amsterdam

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The Problem of the State

In this dissertation, I draw on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork with Egyptians in Amsterdam to investigate how the nationalization of our social-political imagination and infrastructure shapes identities, mediates interpersonal relations, and rearticulates inequalities. I do so to unsettle the idea that people belong to nations, that nations belong to territories, and that national sovereignty is the best, or at least most just form of authority. Instead, I will take these idea as objects of study: where have they come from, how are they being put into practice, and to what effect?

These questions, and the answers I provide, are the outcome of my ongoing effort to learn from 'migrants' and 'immigrants' without further exceptionalizing people who move and settle against the grain of national borders (cf. Dahinden, 2016; Anderson, 2019; 2021; Wyss and Dahinden, 2023). This requires a reflexive approach, which, in my opinion, not only involves acknowledging ourselves as socially positioned knowers, but also, and more importantly, acknowledging our epistemologies as always evolving. In this spirit, I open this dissertation with a brief summary of how I came to frame this endeavor as research with Egyptians and about the nationalization of our social-political world.

I began to think about migration as a vantage point to learn about nation-states in the fall of 2015, when I applied for a PhD position on the making and remaking of a new Europe, for which I was to carry out ethnographic research with Egyptian migrant parents in Amsterdam. I was living in Cairo, but although I had moved there from Amsterdam, I did not think of myself as a migrant, which is of course telling in and of itself. Still, I was excited about the prospect of learning about the country in which I grew up from people who had 'migrated' there from the country to which I had 'moved' to myself. My application was successful, in March 2016, I moved to the Netherlands to get started.

At the time, across Europe, headlines about what was portrayed as a 'refugee crisis' were fueling racist anxieties about the supposed influx and increased presence of brown and black people

(Modest and de Koning, 2016; A. De Koning, 2016). Somewhat separately, in the Netherlands specifically, racism had finally become the subject of mainstream political debates, thanks in large part to the direct actions of the Kick Out Black Pete collective (e.g. Hilhorst and Hermes, 2016) and the steadfast work of anti-racist scholar-activists (e.g. Essed, 1991; Essed and Hoving, 2014; Wekker, 2016). Against this backdrop, I was familiarizing myself with the epistemological underpinnings of migration studies (e.g. Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002; 2003; Glick, Caglar, and Gulbrandsen, 2006), and learned what others already knew, namely that the study of migrants is rooted in, and one of the primary engines of the racialization of the immigrant as the other that defines national selves (Sayad, 2004; Silverstein, 2005; Kwame and Essed, 2006; Anderson, 2013).

The study of migrants is racialized and racializing, indeed. But, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2001) and Mayanthi Fernando (2014a; 2014b) explicate, in ethnography, our "objects of observation" are not, or not necessarily, the same as our "objects of study", and so, research with migrants does not have to be research on migrants. Instead, as Shahram Khosravi's (2010) autoethnography so beautifully illustrates, people interpellated as 'illegal travelers' may offer privileged insight into the seemingly natural order of borders and nation-states (cf. Coutin, 2005; Andersson, 2014). Inspired by these insights, I concluded that my research was *with* Egyptians but *on* the Netherlands, or the Dutch order, and proceeded to carry out the fieldwork.

I began fieldwork by reaching out to the directors of the more active Egyptian associations in Amsterdam. In my message, I explained that I wanted to speak to Egyptians about their experiences in and with the Netherlands, and, if possible, accompany them to their meetings with people working for the state or third-sector organizations. In return, I offered to help people research their options, make phone calls or fill out forms on their behalf, and/or translate between Dutch and Arabic. This offer turned out to be in high demand, and before I knew it, I was accompanying several Egyptians on their mission through the Dutch institutional landscape. In the process, I obtained intimate knowledge about the conditions under which Egyptians move to and make a future in the Netherlands, but, I also realized that, in order to turn my observations into a study on the Netherlands, I had to sharpen my understanding of the Netherlands as such.

As a supposed nation-state, the Netherlands may be imagined as the land that belongs to and is ruled by the Dutch. Or, in more abstract terms, as the isomorphism of territory, citizenry, and sovereign. Of course, such isomorphisms utlimately only exist in our imagination. Still, the longterm effort to build and maintain a Dutch state have created land, people, and authorities that may be called Dutch. Indeed, the nationalization of infrastructure has created a Dutch

territory within which things look and work in specific ways, and for the people with whom I worked, it mattered a lot whether they were on Dutch soil, where they could claim certain rights, or not. The nationalization of legal, political, and social rights may not make for a solidarity group, or a group that lives under the same conditions, but it does create a group of people who, nominally, can claim the same rights, and to become a part of that group by becoming a citizen was a, if not the main goal for the people who were still illegalized when I met them. And, even though Dutch authority is fractured, all institutions had to comply with the law, and, as a legal entity, the Dutch state may be tried in court, or you may be tried by it. So, indeed, the labels 'the Netherlands' or 'Dutch' refer to an actual territory, citizenry, and political entity, and my interlocutors readily used *hollanda*, the Netherlands, as such, for example, to characterize the 'Dutch' weather, 'Dutch' cultural practices, or 'Dutch' politics, and even the nation-state.

Then again, the Dutch territory stretches outwards to international airports and collapses inwards into people's bedrooms in Amsterdam. The illegalized Egyptians with whom I worked in Amsterdam often expressed that they felt like they still had to arrive in the Netherlands. Dutch citizenship is not only a technology of exclusion, but also of hierarchical inclusion. Even if all Dutch citizens were to stand in solidarity with one another, they would still be marked by differences along the lines of race, class, gender, religion, age, ability, and political views, to name but a few dimensions of differentiation. And, Dutch authority is complemented, and challenged, by international and religious authorities, multinational cooperations, and, perhaps most importantly by people who live their lives across borders, according to rules of their own, or their community. In other words, the Netherlands is much more, or much less, than a nation-state. Moreover, none of this is stable over time, and change can be very drastic, to the point that, in some ways, even the Netherlands of the 1990s is hardly recognizable to me, even though this was the context of my youth.

In this dissertation, I hold all of this together through Michael Keith's (2005: 9) metaphor of a 'mirror dance' between, on the one hand, "the expectations of the institutions of the urban system", and, on the other, "the strategies, tactics, successes and the failures of the migrant minorities of first, second, and subsequent generations". People do not move and settle in a vacuum, but in response to (their perception of) the local, national, and global conditions in which they find themselves. In the process, they fail and succeed, and, as they collectively do so, they change the local, national, and global conditions they initially responded to. They create new networks, and new institutions, which may or may not become pathways for future generations of movers and settlers. And they may or may not become the subject of public debates, and, subsequently, top-down interventions. As Keith points out, this dance brings about iconic

spaces and figures, such as 'the ghetto', 'the ethnic entrepreneur', and 'the street rebel'. Anouk de Koning and Anick Vollebergh (2019: 390), in turn, show that such ordinary icons become "commonsense frames for understanding urban landscapes, carve out speaking positions, and come to haunt residents' sense of self as iconic shadows". As such, they "help transport the inequalities laid out in public discourses into people's everyday lives" (ibid).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this mirror dance was nationalized. I argue that, as a result, the people who engage in this mirror-dance today enact nationalist frames, so that the iconic figures that emerge diverge from the master rubrics of 'the national' or that of 'the immigrant' in one way or another. To do so, I describe how Egyptians entered the Dutch stage, and subsequently danced with national and municipal rules and regulations, policies, programs, and professionals they encountered. Yet, while I describe nationalized and migranticized ordinary icons, my descriptions also show that, no matter how profound the impact of nationalization, being cast as a national or immigrant does not completely define us, nor the way in which we make sense of and act upon this. Indeed, if people make their own histories, but not under the conditions of their own choosing, as Karl Marx had it, this certainly applies to so-categorized nationals and immigrants.

In what follows, I will ground these arguments by engaging with the literatures on migration and immigration and nation-states, which beyond the emerging field of critical border studies, are oddly detached from one another. I will then describe in relevant detail the fieldwork that I did, as well as the ethical and analytical questions it raised, before providing an overview of the chapters that make up this dissertation.

The worlds that migration and immigration politics built

"If there were no borders, there would be no migration – only mobility", writes Nicholas de Genova (2013: 250). He has a point. Migration and immigration exist because we label certain practices of moving and settling as such, and our ability to do so stems from borders, or the nationalization of border control. However, before there were borders, there was not 'only mobility'. Rather, there were elaborate systems of forced mobility and forced control, which may not have made for an overarching system of mobility control, but which were as worldmaking as borders are today, such as settler colonialism, transatlantic slave trade, plantation enslavement, and indentured servitude. In this section, I trace some of these histories, not to provide a comprehensive overview of the world as it once was, but rather, to argue that these histories made a world in which contemporary migration and immigration policies became conceivable, and

that those migration and immigration policies reflect and rearticulate those histories into the present.

In the early sixteenth century, European legal scholars saw themselves confronted with the question of what legitimized the use of force against people that colonial tradesmen encountered on their journeys South, East, and West. They found an answer in the inalienable right of people to engage in trade with one another, from which they derived people's inalienable right to move and establish trading posts across the world, as well as the right to use force in case they were denied the right to trade (De Vries and Spijkerboer, 2021). So, while in today's world, the struggle for freedom of mobility is part and parcel of abolitionist politics (Bradley and de Noronha, 2023), once upon a time, it legitimized European colonial endeavors. Of course, this did not mean that there was actually freedom of mobility. Quite to the contrary, at the very same time, European colonialists were bringing together pre-existing African slave markets (Lovejoy, 2011) with the British system of indentured servitude (Billings, 1991) to set up and legalize transatlantic slave trade and plantation economies in the colonies.

In the eighteenth century, the (upcoming) prohibition of slavery raised the thorny question of how to continue to move labor across empire without the institution of slavery. In response, colonial authorities instituted indentured labor (known in Dutch as *contractarbeid*). Drawing on archival work, Radikha Mongia (2018) emphasizes how indentured servitude instituted the contract as the symbol of freedom, while actually legally binding people to live in servitude for ten or more years, and to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, just to pay off the debt of transportation. Meanwhile, following the French revolution (1789-1799), European state authorities began to use passport like identification documents, not to control immigration, but rather to prevent subjects from leaving the territory to escape military service.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the emerging system of mass transportation made urgent the question of how to prevent racialized people from freely travelling. In the US, the initial success of attracting Chinese laborers to the West Coast quickly led to concerns about the waning dominance of white people. Acting on these concerns, US legislators explicitly sought to exclude Chinese workers, and despite much contestation, in 1882, passed the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act. Karin de Vries and Thomas Spijkerboer (2021: 297) describe how, on its contentious way through the courts, the Chinese Exclusion Act upturned people's inalienable rights and instead produced states' right to control migration at will as a function of sovereignty, while reinstating race as a technology to control mobility.

In Europe, and across European empires, authorities wanted to control racialized mobilities too, but after the abolition of slavery, using race to do so had become taboo. Radhika Mon-

gia (2003) describes how, in this conundrum, British-Canadian authorities stumbled upon the passport as a way to keep people from the Indian subcontinent out, while also keeping up the appearance of post-racial equality among British subjects. As Mongia explains, passports were a solution because they create an appearance of horizontality, because in theory, all the commonwealth countries could introduce a passport requirement, while also preventing British subjects from the Indian continent from travelling, because in practice, few of them had access to passports at the time. Importantly, this haphazard introduction created the idea of a Canadian national identity, which hitherto had not existed (139).

In the early twentieth century, passports, or the use of nationality as a technology of mobility control quickly spread across the world. John Torpey (2003) interprets the invention and subsequent spread of passports as a process that produced the idea(l) of a state monopoly on mobility control, not just of people, but also of resources and goods. This is not to say that state actors actually acquired a monopoly over mobility, let alone controlled the processes of who or what moved where and when. Rather, it is to say that mobility control was quickly becoming a central feature of sovereign statehood.

Nandita Sharma (2020) adds that the use of nationality as a mobility technology also marks the birth of the new distinction between 'natives', or people who belong to the land, and 'immigrants', or people who were out of place. This distinction did not quite replace but rather came to overlap the distinction between 'European' and 'native' that colonial endeavors had brought about. That is, those formerly known as 'Europeans' came to be seen as belonging to metropoles and settler colonies, on account of being the first to cultivate the lands, while those formerly known as 'natives' of (settler-)colonies came to be seen as potential 'immigrants' to European and settler-colonial lands.

In the mid-twentieth century, the United Nations, founded in 1945, and the so-called national liberation states (Sharma, 2020) signal the triumph of the idea of national sovereignty over alternative visions on the future after colonialism (Getachew, 2019). Tracing the afterlives of this triumph, Nandita Sharma (2020) points out how international institutions and national liberation states create the appearance of new, horizontal relations between former colonies and metropoles, while the assumption of a level playing field in the international game of controlling the flow of resources, consumer goods, and people helped to keep intact and rearticulate colonial relations on the world stage. Indeed, while institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the WorldBank create an image of horizontality, in practice, already wealthy countries, including the Netherlands, use these institutions to force already impoverished countries, including Egypt, into debt, and unequal trade and migration relationships.

The ideal of national sovereignty also legitimizes, and even naturalizes migration and immigration politics, thus reinforcing the distinction between natives and immigrants on which these politics were built and which they helped to make real. Across the national liberation states, these politics generally took the form of armed conflict between nations with rival claims to the territory, and/or forced expulsion and genocide, producing internally and externally displaced people often living in urban shantytowns or long-term refugee camps. Across the (former) metropoles and settler colonies, this generally took the form of increasingly selective visa policies as well as other policies and practices that seek to deter unauthorized travelers and settlers by blocking access to safe routes and creating hostile environments.

In both national liberation states and former metropoles and settler colonies, migration and immigration policies helped build and maintain national institutions, including national labor markets, welfare, healthcare, and education. However, they did not stop people from travelling and settling unauthorized. This unwanted mobility is interpreted as policy failure, or at least as a consequence of a lack of borders, and as such has prompted and continues to prompt innovation. Indeed, while investing in an international mobility infrastructure that allows the lucky few to travel around the world at an unprecedented scale and pace, wealthy country governments introduce ever stricter visa regulations and border controls. Passports were updated with biometric markers such as photographs, fingerprints, and iris-scans, in order to help border guards establish a unique link between a document and a person (Dijstelbloem, 2021), and across the world, national governments have erected ever more and ever higher walls and fences to keep out unauthorized people (Brown, 2010).

The combination of an ongoing flow of wealth from the former colonies to the former metropoles and settler colonies and of violent and even deadly migration and immigration policies make for what Polly Pallister Wilkins (2020) calls a global color line, and what others have called global apartheid (Sharma, 2005; van Houtum 2010; Besteman 2019). On one side of that line, people are prone to displacement, have to make a living in increasingly depleted environments, lack access to safe routes to where wealth is concentrating, and find themselves in hostile environments if they nevertheless decide to travel. On the other side of that line, people can travel around the world to pursue their desires at an unprecedented speed, without yet having to face the devastating consequences that global capitalism has on this planet.

In the chapters to come, I explore what it takes to cross this global color line from the vantage point of Egyptians in Amsterdam, who partially, but never completely, did so. I will describe in relevant detail the particular histories that shaped the conditions of their lives, including the histories of Dutch and Egyptian efforts to control mobility on the basis of nationality, of resource

extraction from Egypt, and of the concentration of wealth in the Netherlands. Here, I want to draw on the general and admittedly crude historical overview above to point out that efforts to control mobility do not merely reflect but co-constitute our social political world, which is not to say that such efforts are ever fully successful, but rather that they establish the conditions under which people make their lives.

The immigrant, the state, and thinking things otherwise

If nationalized mobility control helped to build and rebuild nation-states, then "thinking about immigration is always also thinking about the state", as Abdelmalek Sayad (2004: 279) insists. In theory, this point is widely recognized, but in practice, beyond the emerging field of critical border studies, migration scholars have not thought about nation-states much. Instead, out of what Ann Stoler (2008: 39) calls epistemic habits, or habitual ways of thinking and knowing, scholars tend to adopt the language and thus the ideas of state policies; migration scholars have focused and continue to focus on identifying the so-called root-causes of migration (for a critique, see Schapendonk and Steel 2014) and measuring immigrants' socio-economic integration and cultural assimilation (for a critique, see Schinkel 2018). As more critical scholars have consistently pointed out, this kind of scholarship is methodologically nationalist, in the sense that it assumes nation-states as the natural social and political form in the world, and as such produces migrants and immigrants as out of place Others, and self-evident academic and policy problems (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002; 2003; Scheel and Tazzioli, 2022).

In a somewhat different vein, anthropologists have focused on exploring the ways in which people who moved and settled across borders produce and reproduce belonging on unfamiliar grounds (e.g. Coe, 2013; Feldman-Savelsberg, 2017; Fog-Olwig, 2016) and form cross-border "affective circuits" through which immigrants circulate money, goods, care, emotions, and fostered children (e.g. Cole and Groes 2016). This approach may appear to avoid methodological nationalism, but as Paul Silverstein (2005) among others points out, nevertheless produces figures of mobile or immigrant Others, such as the nomad, the laborer, the uprooted victim, the hybrid cosmopolite, and the (Muslim) transmigrant. Moreover, as Heba Gowayad (2022) has noted, this scholarship by and large ignores how the idea(l)s and material realities of nation-states shape human potential (to use her phrase), and the lives of people who are formally and informally perceived as immigrants in particular.

The ongoing dominance of methodologically nationalist research should upset anyone interested in the pursuit of knowledge, but it is not surprising. In this world, the vast majority of

knowledge on immigration is produced by (inter)national authorities, such as the International Organization for Migration, and the Dutch Bureau for Statistics. So, researchers have an incentive to adopt the dominant epistemic frameworks of those state institutions, not only to be able to use the data that states collect, but also to be able to speak to those data, and be policy relevant, which is made increasingly important in funding schemes. Moreover, regardless of these incentives, in this world of nation-states, researchers may adopt methodological nationalism out of epistemic habit or ideological conviction.

That said, scholars across disciplines have successfully taken up the urgent task of thinking about nation-states and immigrants together. These scholars have produced a vast body of literature that may loosely be defined as critical border studies, which departs from the basic insight that bordering produces social-material worlds. Historians and historical sociologists have used this as a starting point to the concurrent emergence of migration and immigration politics and nation-states. Radhika Mongia (2003), for example, shows how in the early twentieth century "nationality" was invented as a solution to the thorny problem of how to prevent people from the Indian continent from travelling to Canada while keeping up the appearance of post-racial equality among British subjects. Guno Jones (2016) shows how Dutch citizenship was evoked in order to distinguish between people who were eligible for repatriation from newly independent Indonesia and people who had to stay. In this dissertation, I draw on such historical studies to examine how Dutch migration and immigration politics constitute the Dutch state and vice versa.

Meanwhile, critical sociologists have contributed to the emerging field of critical border studies by unpacking the language of migration and immigration policies in order to reveal the normative frames that these policies bring into being. Nicholas de Genova (2002), for example, critically investigates the category of "the illegal immigrant", and instead proposes the notion of illegalization to get at the processes through which people are made illegal. Willem Schinkel (2018) points out that the notion of immigrant integration assumes society as an already existing whole into which immigrants can integrate into varying degrees, and as imperiled by difference rather than constituted by it. Similarly, Saskia Bonjour and Betty de Hart (2013) investigate how family reunification policies formalize Dutch family norms, and in turn shape the kind of families that immigrants are able to form. In this dissertation, I draw on these insights to similarly investigate the world-making effects of the policy terms that I encountered during fieldwork, such as policies that purport to target "uninvolved Arab fathers" and "disempowered migrant women" (see Chapter Two). I also draw on this work to use alternative language. I have already used so-called migrants and immigrants instead of just migrants and immigrants,

and will also use illegalization instead of illegal. I do use the label "Egyptian" rather than "Egyptianized", which naturalizes the category of Egyptian, but was the label that the people I worked with used to identify themselves. I similarly use such labels as Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch, but I use white Dutch where others might just use Dutch to highlight the category of Dutch as a racialized one.

Finally, critical anthropologists have (implicitly) utilized that distinction between objects of observation and objects of study (Trouillot, 2002; Fernando, 2014a; 2014b) to turn their observations of so-called migrants and the networks they form into studies on migration and immigration politics. Shahram Khosravi (2010), for example, draws on his own experiences as an illegalized traveler to analyze borders as the primary technology for the production and reproduction of inequalities across lines of, amongst others, race, gender, class, age, and ability. Luke de Noronha (2020) draws on fieldwork with young men who were deported from Britain to Jamaica to study the processes by which people are made deportable and actually deported. Heba Gowayed (2002) compares the trajectories of Syrian refugees in Germany, Canada, and the United States to analyze how the state, or more precisely how asylum procedures, shape human potential. As announced above, in this dissertation, I make a similar move in order to shed light on the ways in which Dutch migration and immigration policies writ large conditioned the lives of the Egyptians I met and worked with.

In recent years, scholars have begun to discuss how to label the othering of the immigrant. Inspired by the insights of critical race studies, some scholars have proposed to understand this as a process of racialization (Silverstein 2005) to highlight the historic link between the othering of 'the immigrant' and the othering of 'the native' and 'the slave'. Others have proposed the term migranticization (e.g. Anderson 2019; Dahinden 2016; 2023) to highlight the specificities of nativist modes of othering. Yet others point to the entanglement of anti-immigrant sentiments and Islamophobia to highlight the racialization of Muslims in particular (M. de Koning 2016). I use all these labels, not interchangeably, but rather strategically. That is, where I want to highlight the historic link between race-making and nativist processes of othering, I use racialization, and where I want to highlight nativist othering as a specific process I use migranticization, and where I want to highlight the specific position of Muslims within this all, I use Islamophobia.

Getting started

As anthropology's own rite of passage, ethnographic fieldwork continues to by mythologized as something you can only really understand once you have come out on the other side. In an

attempt to counter that, in the upcoming sections, I describe my fieldwork at some length, and in quite some detail, before teasing out the questions it generated.

I officially started working on my PhD in March 2016, together with my colleagues Lucrezia Botton and Soukaina Chakkour, who were preparing for fieldwork with Egyptian parents in Milan and Paris respectively. As part of the larger Reproducing Europe project led by Dr. Anouk de Koning, and in juxtaposition to her and Milena Marchesi's and Anick Vollebergh's projects on parenting professionals and volunteers in the same cities, we specifically wanted to work with Egyptian parents to collectively study parenting encounters as sites in which a new Europe is negotiated and made and remade (de Koning et al., 2018; de Koning et al., 2023).

In the three years prior, I had lived and worked in Cairo for a total of eighteen months. I had learned the language, and through my friends, already had a good sense of what travel to the Europe in general and the Netherlands in particular meant to aspiring Egyptian youth (Pettit and Ruijtenberg, 2019). However, I did not think I knew any Egyptians in the Netherlands, the country I grew up in. So, I was surprised when, upon hearing about my upcoming research, a family member began to talk about our great cousin 'Hanne's Egyptian'. I had never heard about Hanne, let alone her Egyptian, but apparently, he had been in the family for decades. Intrigued, I began to ask basic questions like how did Hanne met her Egyptian, what had it been like for him to move to and settle in the Netherlands, how had their life together unfolded, and by the way, what is his name? My family member did not know. They had only met Hanne and her Egyptian husband a few times, and had not been in touch with them for decades. But, they kindly offered to put us in touch. I explained that I wanted to develop my approach to the project a little bit further before reaching out.

A few weeks later, my fieldwork nevertheless commenced, when Anouk took us to an Egyptian spring party organized by her neighbor, Faiza. I was nervous about the prospect of meeting people who could become part of my research, but as we arrived, Faiza made us feel right at home. She said she was so excited about meeting us, kissed the women once on each cheek, and told us all that our research was very important. She then walked us over to a table in the middle of the room, before excusing herself to welcome newly arriving guests. After an hour, when the room had filled with about fifty people, the host of the evening took the stage, to welcome everyone and to announce that food was on its way. A few minutes later, a couple of teenagers began to distribute seafood soup and salmon pasta.

After dinner, the host of the evening welcomed two dancers on stage. As the music came on, people began to clap and move along their bodies. My colleagues and I recognized the music from our times in Egypt, and somewhat awkwardly joined the others. As a young, white,

and apparently eligible looking young man, I unintentionally drew the attention of a group of women in their mid-forties sitting at the table next to us, who leaned over to ask me where I had learned to dance like that, and then, if I was married or not, which already goes to illustrate that the people whom I was to meet participate in processes of categorizing and labelling too. Too self-conscious to dance again, I sat still, but when one of the dancers left the stage to look for a volunteer, the women sitting next to us excitedly began to point at me. Unsurprisingly, the dancer indeed picked me to join him on stage. I hesitated for a moment, but quickly decided that it would be more embarrassing not to dance, so I got up and joined the dancers on stage, and danced. After what felt like a long time but what cannot have been more than a minute or two, one of the dancers thanked me, signaling the end of my performance. Relieved, I took a little bow, and hurried back to my seat. As I sat down, the women next to us could not stop laughing.

Hanne and her Egyptian husband

In October 2016, I felt confident enough to take my family member up on her offer to put me in touch with my great aunt Hanne and her Egyptian husband. A few days later, they got back to me with the e-mail address of Paul, Hanne's husband, and instructions to send him an e-mail. I did, and within a couple of hours, he warmly welcomed me to their home, and so, on a sunny afternoon in November 2016, I visited them in their semi-detached home in a leafy neighborhood in one of the Netherlands' wealthiest towns. As they welcomed me into their house, Hanne told me I reminded her of my grandfather, which she clearly intended as a compliment. They had not spent much time together, but she remembered him fondly, she said. I had brought pastries, which Hanne took to the kitchen, while Paul took me to the living room, where they had already laid out several photo-albums.

As we sat down, Paul asked me about the years I spent in Egypt. I said I had a very special time, and asked him when he had last visited, but he said he had not been since his parents passed away twenty years ago. His siblings had left the country too, and with everyone gone, he did not feel much of a connection to the country anymore. Besides, he preferred to go on holidays in more comfortable, and safer places, he said. Then Hanne came back in with a tray of tea and homemade cake. As she served us, Paul opened the photo-albums, and they began to tell me the story of how they had met over fifty years ago, and how their lives had unfolded since.

On the first page, there was a black and white photo of a very young and proud looking Paul, standing in front of a building, which he explained was the Dutch engineering company where

he was training when he and Hanne met. Then there were pictures of their wedding, of their children when they were just born, of Hanne in front of the school where she had worked as a teacher and later as the principal, and of Paul in the municipal council, where he had served as a member of the labor party. And then there were many photos of their very blond grandchildren, including pictures that looked like they could be from a holiday in Sharm el-Sheikh, but the pictures were from Eilat, Israel, they explained. You don't take children like that to Egypt, Paul explained.

After about an hour, Hanne kindly asked about my research. I explained that I wanted to study the Netherlands from the vantage point of Egyptians, and was particularly interested in people's experiences with marginalization and exclusion. Hanne and Paul seemed enthusiastic. Hanne said she was appalled by the present-day stigmatization of immigrants in the Netherlands, and Paul said that he could not begin to imagine what it would have been like for him to arrive in the Netherlands as it is today. Of course, he had had his difficulties too. Learning the language had not been easy, and he had had to familiarize himself with the way in which things work here. Still, after Paul acquired citizenship, they had lived a comfortable life, and their three sons had done very well: the first was a lawyer, the second was a surgeon, and the third was professor at a Dutch university.

I then took the opportunity to ask Paul if he had any recommendations for how to go about my research. Paul seemed to give it a thought, but after a few seconds, apologetically explained that he could not help me much, because he did not know any Egyptians in the Netherlands, and the lives of the Egyptians he met in the context of his work as a certified translator were very different from his. I asked him to elaborate. He looked around the living room as if he was looking for something to illustrate what he was about to say and then raised his hands in a manner that seemed to suggest that it all kind of spoke for itself. They do not live like this, he said. They live in small houses, with big families, but little money, rolling from one problem to another. I nodded, and said that that indeed seemed very different.

Apparently encouraged, Paul went on to explain that, as an already highly educated man, he had been able to adjust to life in the Netherlands, so much so that he had become Dutch. This is also why he had legally changed his and his children's last name to a more Dutch sounding name, he said. By contrast, the Egyptians he met in court were generally uneducated, lower-class people who were struggling to adjust to life in the Netherlands and thus continued to live as they had lived in Egypt, namely in poor conditions and unenlightened (niet verlicht, he said, in Dutch). You will see for yourself, he said, perhaps sensing my growing discomfort with what reminded me of the stigmatizing narratives of immigrants that circulated in mainstream Dutch

media at the time. Not knowing what to say, and sensing that the conversation was winding down, I began to thank him and Hanne for a lovely afternoon, and some fifteen minutes later, I was on my way home.

The people whom I would meet at the Egyptian associations where I would carry out much of my fieldwork were not a uniform group, but Paul was right in the sense that they had lived very different lives than he had. Paul came of age in the years immediately after Egyptian independence (1952), when Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser restricted emigration and used domestic migrants' labor to develop the Egyptian nation-state. He was exempted from staying in Egypt because he was going to train to become an engineer, after which he was supposed to return to help develop his country. He travelled to the Netherlands at a time in which the Dutch state did not yet require Egyptian citizens to acquire a visa before entering the territory, and he settled long before the Dutch government developed its so-called minority policy. By contrast, the people I met at the Egyptian associations grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, decades in which the Egyptian middle-class was beginning to split into a cosmopolitan upper class (Bayat, 2003; A. de Koning, 2009) and a middle class poor for whom travelling to work in a wealthy country was one of the few ways to bridge the gap between the life they aspired to and the life that seemed to be available to them in Egypt (Pettit, 2023). They travelled to the Netherlands at a time in which the Dutch state required Egyptian citizens to hold a visa, but was making it increasingly difficult to acquire one. From the 1990s onwards, the Dutch state, as part of the Schengen area, was also making it increasingly dangerous to try and enter the country unauthorized, and in the Netherlands, those who did, were illegalized, while those who entered the country un temporary visa faced the threat of illegalization.

In short, in comparison to the Egyptians whom I would later meet, Paul was relatively privileged. Still, no matter how hard he had tried, and how far he had come, Paul had been and continued to be perceived as an immigrant. With his Egyptian degree, he had been unable to find a position as an engineer. Having passed the legal retirement age, he still had to work to make ends meet because he only received state pension for the years that he had legally resided in the Netherlands (see Chapter Four for more on this). And, I, his nephew once removed, had only reached out to him because of his assumed Egyptianness, forcing him to once again distance himself from 'real' immigrants. In that sense, he was perhaps less different than the Egyptians I met at the associations than he wanted to be.

In this dissertation, I will mostly draw on my conversations and work with people I met at the different associations. However, my analysis is as much inspired by Paul, and throughout this dissertation, I will reference his life in order to bring in earlier stages of that mirror dance

between policy makers and professionals on the one hand, people who try to move and settle across borders on the other.

Hanging out

In January 2017, I reached out to the director of what I thought were Egyptian associations (see Chapter Two for an explanation of this phrasing). I told them I wanted to study the Netherlands from the vantage point of Egyptians, and was therefore looking for people who were willing to talk to me and, ideally, take me with them to their meetings with Dutch officials and professionals.

I began by calling Faiza, whom I had already met during that 'spring party'. She immediately realized who I was. "You looked so tall on that stage", she said, barely holding her laughter. "But people loved it," she assured me, chuckling affectionately. I chuckled too, and thanked her for her kind words, before asking her if she was available to meet. A few days later, on a cold, rainy day, we met over a cup of coffee in a café near her home. As she already knew about the research, I asked her what she thought about it. She said she was excited about the larger project, and especially liked the comparison between Amsterdam, Milan, and Paris. It's very different over there, she said, elaborating that, by comparison, the Netherlands offered more and better organized services. This was both a good and a bad thing, she emphasized, because while it meant that there was more to benefit from, it also meant there was more to fear. She spent most of her time helping people navigate the system, she said, and was very happy to take my offer of a helping hand. "You can work for me," she said, chuckling again. "Well, where can I sign," I said, extending my hand to seal the deal. Still laughing, she shook my hand, and got down to business. I have two people for you, she said. She did not want to share too much information, but said she was positive that we would benefit from each other. She would reach out to them, and get back to me as soon as possible. I thanked her, and hurried to pay for our coffees before she would.

In the weeks that followed, I reached out to the other directors of the more active Egyptian associations in Amsterdam through Facebook. They, too, warmly welcomed me, and they too tried to recruit me to work with them, asking me to help them organize activities and connecting me to people who were looking for someone to help them navigate the Dutch institutional landscape. I enthusiastically agreed, not fully realizing yet that these directors were actually competing with each other for funding and participants, and in that context saw me as a potential resource. I became aware of this competition and my role in it after a couple of months, when

some of the directors began to ask me to spread rumors on the others, for example on who they were collaborating with and where they were getting their money from. I categorically refused to spread such rumors, and made it clear that I would continue to work with all the directors, regardless of their politics, and would not take sides.

The directors generally accepted my position. However, a few weeks into my fieldwork, a man who had invited me to his home under the pretext of filling in some form confronted me with pictures of me at different associations in order to accuse me of spying. I asked him where he got the pictures from, but he would not tell, so I just confirmed that I was hanging out at various associations, and did not want to get involved in associational politics. He nodded but did not seem convinced. Ill at ease, I decided to just leave, without ever filling out the form that had been the pretext for my visit. A few days later, I heard that he had fallen out with the directors of the association where I had met him, and was no longer welcome to join the meetings. I neither saw nor heard about him again. Still, the incident compelled me to check whether I was still welcome, and since the directors said I was, I continued to participate in the activities of the four main associations for the entire duration of my fieldwork.

On Friday nights, I would go to the neighborhood restaurant that Ali was running. I usually had dinner with Bahaa, a close friend of Ali who was also heavily involved in Etihad, one of the other associations. Afterwards, we were usually joined by the two chefs, Mirvat and Soraya, and Soraya's two children. These were lovely evenings, filled with laughter and good food, as well as in-depth conversations about Dutch and Egyptian politics. Ali also connected me to several people who were looking for help in navigating the Dutch institutional landscape, including Ibrahim, who suspected that his ten-year-old son's teachers were racially profiling him (see Chapter Four). Ali himself asked me to accompany him to a meeting with his son's teachers, and to talk to his daughter, who started studying at the University of Amsterdam in September 2017 and was contemplating taking off her headscarf in order to stand out less.

On Saturday evenings, I attended the weekly meetings at Etihad, the only association run by and for men. Gamal, Etihad's director, led these meetings in a strict and orderly fashion, which he said he had learned at his job at the municipality, and to which he referred in Dutch as *professioneel*, professional. Afterwards, the men prayed together, or gathered in smaller groups to quietly chat. The meetings were usually attended by about six or seven men in their forties and fifties who had been in the Netherlands for at least two decades. They typically presented themselves as businessmen, showing me their business cards and pictures of enterprises. As I continued to hang out, I found out that most of these businesses were no longer or had never been in operation. Instead, these men had worked in physically demanding lines until work-

related injuries prevented them from continuing to do so, after which they had come to rely on welfare benefits. Only a few of them were still working. I did not say much during the formal part of the meetings. Instead, I listened while the men discussed Egyptian and Dutch politics and quarreled about Etihad's organization and finances. I did not participate in the prayer, but usually hung around to chat with the people I was more personally involved with. I also attended Etihad's special events, including a workshop on the general elections in March 2017 organized by Ali, Bahaa, and myself, a workshop on involved fatherhood for Arab fathers organized by Gamal (see Chapter Three), and an Egyptian movie night organized by Bahaa. In the summer of 2017, when I asked Gamal and Bahaa to get involved in the case of Saïd (see Chapter One), they in turn began involving me in the ongoing case of Emad, who went to prison for tax-fraud, and Mahmoud, who became homeless after his wife divorced him (see Chapter Four).

On Monday and Wednesday mornings, I attended the workshops organized by Karima and her associates at Tamkin. This included an eight-week workshop on mental health for migrant women developed by an organization called Punt P and hosted by a Dutch-Moroccan woman, an afternoon on the municipality's various child support programs for parents with a low income, and a workshop on (de)radicalization for parents of at risk youth funded by the municipality and hosted by a sheikha (a female scholar of Islam) who Karima had hired (see Chapter Two). The workshops often touched upon intimate matters, and a few times, Karima subtly suggested that I could also join for lunch after the formal part of the workshop. Over lunch, the women attending Karima's workshops usually talked about the everyday challenges of managing their families in the Netherlands. Karima held strong opinions on these matters, and often dominated the discussions, giving (unsolicited) advice, or just sharing her opinions (see Chapter Four for a description of such a discussion). She sometimes called on me to back her up, especially on her claims on the Netherlands, but I usually just said that I was there to learn. Over the course of my fieldwork, Karima did connect me with some people whom she felt needed my help, but these people were not always interested in working with me. On the other hand, some people who attended the workshops reached out to me without telling Karima, because they felt that she might judge them for doing so.

Initially, I also went to Malika's Thursday morning coffee hours. However, these coffee hours were not well attended. In fact, most of the times I went, Malika and I were the only ones there, and although I enjoyed talking to her, soon enough, I began prioritizing other fieldwork activities. I also skipped Malika's women's exercise classes, as well as her women's beauty salon, because I felt like it would be intrusive to attend. A few months into my fieldwork, Malika's

coffee mornings and women's exercise classes were cancelled after a multicultural dinner gone wrong (see Chapter Two). I did attend the dinners that Malika organized at different neighborhood centers she was able to negotiate access to. The people attending these dinners generally presented themselves as well-educated and well-integrated, but often accused each other of behaving just like the uneducated and unintegrated Egyptians they so despised. They appeared to enjoy having me around, but they did not necessarily ask me for help.

As I was hanging out at the different associations, more and more people asked me to help them navigating the Dutch institutional landscape. On the one hand, I was happy they did, because it made me feel like the actual people I was working with were also benefitting from my presence. Then again, I also worried that the people who were reaching out were only interested in participating in my research because of the help I offered, and expected me to make much more of a difference than I could. So, in addition to explaining that I would be writing a dissertation based on my observations, I also hurried to emphasize that I was not in a position to pull any strings. These little speeches did not appear to alter people's minds about working with me. That is, the people who were reaching out did not seem concerned about participating in research and insisted that, at the very least, I could help them figure out their options and/or take the steps they wanted to take.

The people with whom I thus began to work tended to find themselves in truly trying and sometimes even life threatening situations. As I began to work with them, I could not shake the feeling of stepping into a long history of white humanitarians 'helping' brown and black people in order to ease their consciousness but without actually organizing for systematic change (Ticktin, 2011). Still, I could not bear to refuse what help I could offer, in part because I actually did feel like I was making a difference for these people, and in part because I felt like working with them would also make a difference for my project.

In the following, I share snapshots of the work that I thus did with Saïed, Hamza, Mahmoud, and Amira, who were among the people with whom I worked most intensely, and who feature prominently in the chapters to come. I do so to introduce the ethical and analytical questions that I was grappling with throughout my fieldwork, and to provide a first glimpse of life as mediated by Dutch migration and immigration politics.

Snapshot 1: Saïed

I met Saïed (34) in the summer of 2017, when a friend who knew about my research asked me to visit him in the immigration detention center where he had been held since the summer of 2016

when his request for asylum had been denied. I agreed, so a few days later, Saïed and I awkwardly sat on opposite ends of the elongated table-like structure separating the center's visitor's room into two sides: one for detainees, one for visitors. After exchanging a few pleasantries, he shyly asked if he could tell his story. He had not had an opportunity to do so in Arabic, and would really like to, he said. I welcomed him, and so he talked, about fleeing Egypt and about expecting to find refuge in the Netherlands only to find out that, despite all the talk about human rights, in the Netherlands, you can be detained without even being accused of committing a crime, and that Dutch prison guards can bully and beat you without repercussions. Then, the hour had passed, and two guards came to take Saïed back to his cell.

A few weeks later, Saïed was suddenly released. The next day, after a cup of coffee on a sunny terrace, Saïed told me one of the guards had asked him if he was happy. "Happy, what happy, how can I be happy after everything," he said agitatedly. I nodded, and before I could think of something to say, he told me he would leave the country as soon as he could. He did not do so, and instead found a lawyer to help him appeal the rejection of his asylum request. After a year and a half of anxious waiting, he finally received asylum, making him eligible for social services and family reunification. At the moment of writing, he lives in a social-housing apartment in a town near Amsterdam with his wife and children, and works for a municipally funded organization providing service to vulnerable residents.

Snapshot 2: Hamza, Bassant, and Momo

Hamza (38) arrived to the Netherlands in the spring of 2016 as the dependent spouse of his wife Bassant, who was an Italian citizen. However, when I met him in January 2017, Bassant had left together with their son Momo (2), and he had no idea where they were. Initially, I was reluctant to help him find her because it seemed to me that she did not want to be found. But then, after a few weeks of hanging out with him, Bassant suddenly reached out. Apparently, the police had taken her to a shelter after she had told them that Hamza was locking her up inside her room. She had quickly retracted these accusations, but for one reason or another, the people at the shelter had not reached out to Hamza to let him know where she and Momo were.

In the year that followed, Bassant and the myriad of healthcare and welfare professionals involved slowly led Hamza back into Momo's life. In the meantime, he was cleaning offices, restaurants, and hotel rooms for twelve hours a day, six days a week. In the summer of 2017, he was forced to take two weeks off due to pain in his back and shoulders. I suggested that he could apply for welfare benefits so that his body could properly rest, but Hamza swiftly rejected

the idea, saying that such benefits were "addictive". Instead, he would use these two weeks to develop his own business further, following the example of the Egyptians he was working for, insisting that, no matter what, hard and smart work must pay off in the Netherlands.

Snapshot 3: Mahmoud and Fatma

Mahmoud (51) was one of Etihad's regulars, but we did not talk much until April 2017, when he invited me for a cup of coffee at HEMA, a popular Dutch department store. As we sat down, he almost immediately began to tell me why he had invited me. Apparently, a few weeks earlier, his wife Fatma had told him that if he did not leave the house, she would call the police and tell them that he was planning to take the children to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. He was not, he assured me, but fearing that the police would take the accusations seriously, he went to stay at a friend's place. After that, in order to become eligible for full household benefits, Fatma had deregistered him from their address, enabling herself to pay her rent, while making Mahmoud formally homeless, so that his benefits were cut to a homelessness allowance of a few hundred euros a month. On top of that, following a report from the family's so-called Parent and Child Advisor, the Child Care and Protection Board had launched an official investigation into the children's safety, and in the meantime, Mahmoud was not allowed to see them. At loss, he had come to ask for my help, he said, shyly.

In the weeks and months that followed, I watched Mahmoud grow increasingly frustrated as he followed the Employee Insurance Agency's reintegration program, tried to set up a halal-meat import business, applied for priority on Amsterdam's waiting list for social housing, and petitioned to become the resident parent of his children. His frustration was not or at least not only directed at his soon to be ex-wife, but rather at the government, or the system, as he referred to it. At the most frustrating moments, he would say that, after becoming a citizen, he had always followed the rules and always paid his taxes, only to be pushed out of his own house and away from his children like that. After a year, Mahmoud announced that he was looking to get married again, ideally to someone who was already living in a house, and someone with whom he could have children again. A friend introduced him to an Egyptian woman who had recently lost her husband, and was looking to get married again too. They did, and a year later, she gave birth to their daughter, giving Mahmoud a new chance to be the father he wanted to be.

Snapshot 4: Amira and her son Ahmed

I met Amira (36) in January 2017, when one of the directors of the associations asked me to help her to find help for her fourteen year old son Ahmed. Over a cup of tea, Amira told me that Ahmed was getting suspended so often that he was spending more time at home than at school. She said she realized that she had no choice but to consent to the so-called exploratory program that Ahmed's teachers were suggesting, which would take three months and which his teacher's said was designed to figure out what Ahmed needed in order to prosper. Amira feared that this would be the first step towards a school for children with special needs, which she feared would impede his chances on the career that she had in mind for him.

In the year that followed, Ahmed spent more time on waiting lists for various programs than at school, and more time on the streets than at home, sometimes not returning until early in the morning, leaving his mother guessing where he had been. When he was home, he was often aggressive, and sometimes even hit his mother and two younger brothers. On multiple occasions, Amira found large quantities of drugs along with lists of phone numbers, leading her to believe that he was dealing. She also found a crowbar and a balaclava, which he claimed were not his. In the meantime, more and more professionals gathered around Ahmed's case to do nothing, as Amira put it. Amira, in turn, pleaded with them to act, going as far as calling the police on her son, but not as far as calling the Child Care and Protection Board, as she feared that this would push them to remove him from the house, which she did not think would improve the situation.

Reflecting on her experiences over a cup of tea one morning in 2017, she told me that after her divorce, she had expected the state to provide for her and her children, like a husband, but without telling her what to do and what not to do, only to find that the state was much more of a husband that she had anticipated. "They come, one by one, they listen to you, they will tell you they have a solution, but in the end, it's all just talk talk talk and no action", which perhaps says something both about how she experienced her ex-husband and about how she experienced the Dutch state. Either way, tired of the talk, in the spring of 2018, Amira decided to take matters into her own hands by sending Ahmed to stay with her brothers in Egypt.

Fieldwork ethics

As my fieldwork unfolded, I became concerned with questions of consent, the boundaries of research relations, and, eventually, representation. I will describe how I dealt with particular

ethical tensions throughout this dissertation, but here, I do so in more general terms.

As I began to work with these people, I became increasingly concerned about consent. I was sure that people only shared information they trusted me with, but I also felt they only volunteered intimate information as readily as they did because I actually needed it in order to help them. Conversely, I also worried that the people who reached out to volunteer certain information did so because they expected my research to positively impact their situation, or even policy writ large, which I doubted it would, and which it so far has not. I tried to address both of these concerns by going over the terms of my research again and again. I emphasized that people could pull out without losing my support at any time and that I did not expect my research to have a direct impact on policy. I doubt that this had any effect, but I am confident that the people who feature in this dissertation do not mind or may even be pleased with the role that they play, because I asked them, and because they very kindly continue to ask me how my dissertation is coming along.

Second, as I navigated the Dutch institutional landscape with people like Saïed, Hamza, Mahmoud, and Amira, they increasingly asked me for favors that could harm other people in their lives. In most cases, it was easy to say no. For example, Hamza asked me to testify in court that his ex-wife was a bad mother to support his request for custody, which I declined to do, while Mahmoud asked me to spread rumors about the meat of one of his competitors, which I categorically refused as well. In other cases, this was much more difficult. For example, Amira asked me not to tell the authorities that her son Ahmed was hitting his little brothers, lest they remove him from the house, and while I understood where she was coming from, seeing Ahmed's ten and five year old brothers beaten up also made me feel like I was doing the wrong thing in doing as she asked. Somewhat similarly, Farida, a mother of four who was assaulted by her husband, asked me not to reach out to the police or a women's shelter until she had prepared her departure, but as she kept on being beaten, I actually feared for her and her children's safety. In navigating these questions, I asked advice from people I trusted, including the directors I was working with, my direct colleagues in the Reproducing Europe research project, and the project's ethical board.

Third, as I began to think through and write about my findings, I increasingly worried about the image of Egyptians that my impromptu approach of conducting fieldwork on the basis of support was producing. As indicated above, as I set out to do fieldwork, I wanted to avoid contributing to processes of racialization. However, as my fieldwork unfolded, I increasingly worried that my approach of working with people who were desperate for the support that I offered was actually producing an image of 'Egyptians in Amsterdam' as an 'at risk' and 'risky'

population that requires both care and control. In other words, I feared and to a degree still fear that my work and this dissertation contributes to migranticization, or the racialization of immigration, or to Islamophobia. In an attempt to counter this, I want to stress that the people who appear in this dissertation are not representative of the larger group of Egyptians in Amsterdam, which is not a homogenous group anyway, and that this is not a study of Egyptians in Amsterdam as such, but rather of life as mediated by Dutch institutions, and the larger web of rules and regulations within which they are embedded. This brings me to the question of how to make sense of the diversity among the people I met and came to know.

The problem of the state

The Egyptians I met in Amsterdam came from many different backgrounds, and found themselves in many different situations. I met Muslims, Copts, and Protestants. I met people who grew up in oil-producing Arab countries, the Egyptian countryside, or in Cairo, Alexandria, or industrialized towns and cities. I met people from working-class and upper-class backgrounds, people who did not finish high-school and people who were teaching at Dutch universities. I met people who left Egypt when they were still children and people who left as grandparents. I met people who travelled straight to the Netherlands and people who had initially travelled to other places. I met people who came to the Netherlands in the 1950s, and people who had just arrived. I met people who travelled to the Netherlands unauthorized, people who applied for and were denied or granted asylum, people who travelled as tourists and did or did not overstay their visa, people who travelled as students and did or did not overstay their visa, and people who travelled as dependent spouses. I met people who had not yet managed to legalize their stay in the Netherlands, and people who did, for example through marriage to an EU citizen. I met people who became very rich in the Netherlands and people who became very poor. I met people who already had families when they came, people who started families in the Netherlands, and people who went through one or more divorces creating multiple household families. I met people who were actively looking for other Egyptians, people who were actively distancing themselves but were nevertheless well-connected to other Egyptians and people who did not seem to care very much about the nationality or ethnicity of their associations.

In short, on paper, the only thing that the people I met had in common was that they were all born in Egypt, had been assigned Egyptian citizenship by birth, and at one point or another had moved to Amsterdam. As they did, they encountered multiple ideas and systems related to the state, such as the idea that the Dutch state respects human rights, what Dutch welfare

benefits are, and the idea that the Dutch state provides a modicum of care to all residents and citizens, as well as the systems that make up borders, labor markets, welfare states, education systems, healthcare, and family laws, amongst others.

Anthropologists of the state have long warned against understanding this plurality through the singular analytic of 'the state'. Following Radcliff-Brown (1940) who famously described the state as a fiction of philosophers, anthropologists initially disregarded the state in favor of the study of politics and law in what they saw as their more natural form, in "stateless societies". Only in the 1990s, when political scientists and political sociologists took the end of the cold war as a sign of a new era of globalization and thus a waning importance of the nation-state, did anthropologists take a renewed interest in the state. Drawing on the theoretical work of sociologist Philippe Abrams (1988) who distinguishes between state-ideas and state-systems, and political theorist Timothy Mitchell (1991) who theorizes the state as an effect, but working from within what they described as the margins of the state (Das and Poole, 2004), they conceptualized an understanding of the state as a "fictional reality" (Aretxaga, 2003), as a diffuse and fragmented set of "ideas", "systems" and "practices" that has no clear boundaries, is neither coherent nor stable, but nevertheless imagined and reified as a monolithic and unified entity (cf. Nagengast, 1994; Aretxaga, 2003; Sharma and Gupta, 2009).

In recent years, this "new" anthropology of the state has been elaborately critiqued, for prioritizing "state-images" over "state-practices" (e.g. Thelen and Albers eds 2018), for emphasizing state-coercion at the expense of the more benevolent side of the state (e.g. Jansen, 2015), and, most severely so, for refusing to contextualize or situate contemporary anthropological approaches of the study of the state within an existing body of empirical and theoretical work on the state from related disciplines such as history, sociology and political science (e.g. Marcus 2008; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan 2014). According to Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (2014: 52) the "classical reflex of anthropology" to privilege marginal and peripheral sites in the Global South combined with the (willful) ignorance of the findings of empirical sociology of organizations and bureaucracies in the Global North has led to a tendency to "re-invent the wheel and to present certain truisms of organizational sociology as more innovative findings than they really are" and to "exoticize the states of the South by comparing actual practices in the South with an idealized notion of how things work in the North" (54). Similarly, Anthony Marcus (2008: 61) suggests that anthropology's "ultra-empiricist orthodoxy" has led anthropologists to disregard the possibility that the state could be real, as a thing that "has a coherence based on hundreds of years of accumulated capital and institutional knowledge about political organization, ideological struggle" as Marxist state-theories have it, or a "real living institution with

a historical trajectory and conscious planning" as Weberian state-theories have it.

I agree and disagree with both the not-so new anthropology of the state and their critics. I agree that it makes no sense to suggest that the state is monolithic, and that it is misleading and politically devastating to reify it as such, and so I disagree with Marcus (2008), who seems to suggest that states can be made more or less monolithic. However, as the stories of Saïed, Hamza and Bassat, Mahmoud and Fatma, and Amira and Ahmed attest to, I also found that the Dutch state was real in its consequences, and so I cannot but disagree with those authors who dismiss the state as fictional reality. In short, I stumbled upon what Elif Babül (2017) calls the paradox of the state, namely that states are at once extremely stable and consolidated and incoherent and volatile.

In this dissertation, I embrace this paradox by describing the Dutch state as an abstraction through which Egyptians made sense of the past, navigated the present, and imagined the future, and as a field of forces that could at once uplift them, push them around, and knock them down, as Saïed, Hamza, Mahmoud, and Amira experienced. In doing so, I draw on and seek to contribute to a promising line of research on the state that seeks to theorize the state by ethnographically studying what kind of state people yearn for (Jansen, 2015), how they try to be 'seen' by the state (Street 2012), and how they try to 'personalize' or appropriate officials and bureaucratic rules and logics in order to make them fit their personal lives (Koch 2019). As announced above, I take these attempts to be seen by and personalize the state as part and parcel of the mirror-dance between bureaucrats trying to manage populations and individuals and communities trying to improve the conditions of their lives.

Outline of the dissertation

In the upcoming chapters, I explore how the people with whom I worked danced with the conditions in which they found themselves, thus bringing into view different fields of forces that we may label the state.

In Chapter One, I show how Dutch borders sort people into Dutch nationals and different kinds of non-nationals, including "illegals", "asylum seekers", and "dependent spouses". Drawing on the brief introduction of borders provided above, I begin by analyzing borders as part and parcel of a global mobility regime that facilitates the extraction of resources from countries like Egypt and the concentration of wealth in countries like the Netherlands, and enables citizens of countries like the Netherlands to move and settle when and where they want, while preventing citizens from countries like Egypt from doing the same. As I will show, this unequal mobility

regime contributes to an image of the Netherlands as a pathway towards a better future, and as a place where hard and smart work pays off, but makes the journey from Egypt to the Netherlands dangerous and potentially lethal for most Egyptians. I then trace the actual migration journeys of Mostafa, Saïed, and Anastasia, to show that moving and settling across the multiple layers of Dutch borders is marked by an oscillation between existential mobility, or the sense of going somewhere in life, and the sense of getting stuck again (Pettit and Ruijtenberg, 2019). I do so to suggest that living with Dutch borders produces and reproduces hope for a better future, while also making it highly unlikely for people to reach the future they aspire to.

In Chapter Two, I examine the new forms of social organization and cultural expression that emerged as Egyptians danced with integration and other target-group policies. I focus, as Michael Keith did, on the locally specific 'iconic' spaces that this dance produces, in this case Egyptian snackbars and Egyptian associations, and their associated figures of Egyptian snackbar owner and the association's director. The Egyptian snackbar owner is a man who comes from a modest background, but became rich by working hard and smart and sometimes a little bit dirty. This figure received quite some media attention, especially in discussions around the disneyfication of Amsterdam's city center. The men whom I met at the associations drew on this figure to distinguish Egyptians from Moroccan and Turkish 'guest-workers' who the people with whom I worked figured as only ever having been 'employees', and, if possible, to distinguish themselves as being more than the average Egyptian. The director of the immigrant association was figured as an empowered and free-spirited woman, or a fraud in search of social status, depending on whom you would ask. In the context of contemporary integration policies, these associations appear as symbols of the failure of the supposedly multicultural approach to integration. In fact, following the defunding of immigrant associations in the 1990s, the directors with whom I worked had long ago rebranded their associations as neighborhood or women associations, and were actually applying for funding for activities meant to create neighborhood cohesion or women's empowerment. In practice, they continued to organize for Egyptians, which in turn created tensions between them, the people they were organizing for, and the people who appeared to be committed to creating neighborhood ties across cultures. This chapter shows how integration and other target-group policies produce the groups that they purport to target, and in turn, become the conditions under which people may organize.

In the Netherlands, people who do not hold citizenship or permanent residency are categorically excluded from most welfare services. However, amidst the variety of people I met, most of the people with whom I worked on a one on one basis had become Dutch citizens long ago, and lived in social housing and relied on various welfare benefits. In Chapter Three, I take this as my

cue to investigate welfare services as a sorting mechanism. To do so, I explore in some detail the process of divorce. As the snapshots of the lives of Hamza, Mahmoud, and Amira presented above already indicate, divorce often left fathers homeless and out of touch with their children, while pushing mothers deeper into their role of mother, leaving little to no room for any other aspirations. I draw on these findings to analyze welfare as the life-world of marginalized people, as opposed to more privileged people, whose lives are just as much facilitated by the state, but for whom the state is much less of a limitation. As I will show, while welfare is imagined to treat all citizens on the basis of what they do and not who they are, in practice, it actually matter how long you have legally resided in the Netherlands, and whether or not you hold dual citizenship, so that people who moved to the Netherlands and became Dutch citizens later in life are still differently situated than their fellow citizens.

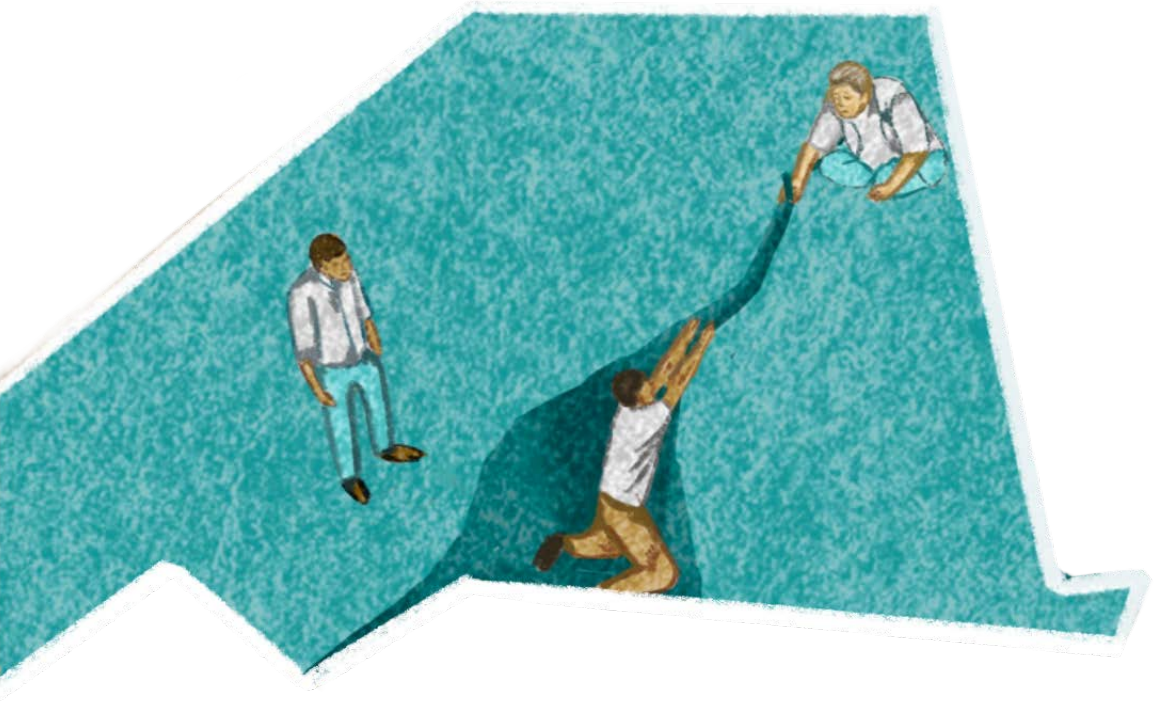
In Chapter Four, I start from the observation that the people with whom I worked were narrating migration as a sacrifice for their children, while the teachers and child and youth welfare professionals they encountered readily professed to work in the best interest of the child. Reflecting their initial takes, in relations to their children, the parents with whom I worked imagined the Netherlands as a pathway towards a better future for their children, and as a place full of seductions, and a general lack of respect for family. So, for them, parenting became the struggle of making sure that their children were benefitting from the Dutch education system and labor market, without falling prey to the many temptations or disregarding their family. Parents also worried that their children were actually discriminated against by their teachers and other professionals involved in their lives. This was a fear that the parents with whom I worked did not like to put into words, at least not with white Dutch people in the room, as they sensed that bringing up racism could well work against them. Instead, parents deployed different strategies. I describe these strategies to investigate how the tensions between ostensible citizen equality and persistent institutional racism played out in the everyday lives of Egyptians.

In Chapter Five, the final empirical chapter, I investigate street-level bureaucrats' efforts to induce the right state of mind in their clients on the one hand, and people's efforts to induce the right state of mind in the street-level bureaucrats they encountered on the other hand. I begin by discussing how eligibility checks prompted Egyptians to once again fit themselves in the right categories in order to convince street-level bureaucrats that they were eligible, which appeared to activate that atmosphere of suspicion that is baked into eligibility checks. I then discuss street-level bureaucrats' attempts to convince people to consent to the kind of services that they said were in everyone's best interest, but which the supposed recipients of these services often saw as (part of) the problem itself. Finally, I turn to the phase after enrollment, which was marked

by the twin effort of street-level bureaucrats and the people I worked with to make the other behave as they should. I then suggested that although all this affective labor might undermine the ideal of impersonal authority, in practice, both street-level bureaucrats and migranticized people held on to these ideals, and drew on them in order to negotiate the boundaries between public and private, with both seeking to define which problems were public and thus required public solutions, and which problems were private and thus required private solutions. Taken together, I show how street-level bureaucrats and the people with whom I worked negotiated which problems are to be addressed through public means, and which problems are to remain private.

In the conclusion, I repeat that immigrants and states exist by virtue of each other and hang together through the framework of the nation-state. I then draw on the findings presented in Chapter One to Five to make the argument that I announced above, namely that migration and immigration politics produce social-material inequalities, mediate interpersonal relations, and shape the way in which people see themselves, each other, and the world around them, but ultimately do not define people, nor the way in which they make sense of or act upon the world.

I finish with an epilogue, in which I tell the story of a Bahaa, who became very dear to me but suddenly passed away in October 2018. His death tells yet another story about the Dutch state, but I will tell his story to suggest that, no matter how important the Dutch state was in the lives and deaths of the people with whom I worked, ultimately, their lives cannot and should not be reduced to what they tell us about the world of nation-states. It is in this spirit that I write this dissertation.



1
Borders

In the early hours of September 21, 2016, a fishing trawler carrying five hundred people capsized off the Egyptian north coast. This was not the first Egyptian ship wrecking in the Mediterranean that year. On the 3rd of June, 2016, more than three hundred people died after an Egyptian boat capsized off Crete, Greece. On the 9th of April, 2016, about five hundred people died after a boat capsized northwest off Alexandria, Egypt. Before that, more shipwrecks, and more deaths. In fact, the list probably goes back to at least the early 1990s, when the North African coast became a point of departure for people who were travelling to Europe, but had lost access to safe routes to Europe due to a combination of restrictive visa regimes and externalized border controls (Spijkerboer, 2018).

Egyptian shipwrecks rarely make headlines. Reflecting a more general attempt to preserve an image of political stability and socio-economic progress, Egyptian authorities have long pressured journalists into ignoring the shipwrecks, or, if that was not attainable, to (mis)identify the majority of victims as sub-Saharan Africans who should not have been in the country anyway (Norman, 2016; Völkel, 2022). Meanwhile, European journalists and academics have treated the wrecking of Egyptian ships as minor in comparison to the wrecking of Tunisian and Libyan ships.

But, on that 21st of September, 2016, things were different, or actually, had been a little bit

different for a while. For starters, whereas most shipwrecks happen under the cover of the night, or far away, this one happened at dawn, and at a mere twelve nautical miles off the densely populated and easy to reach town of Rashid (known in English as Rosetta). More importantly, at the time, the world leaders were gathering in New York for the United Nations general assembly, during which the so-called European refugee crisis was one of the main topics[1]. Shipwrecks symbolized that crisis, and so, on a day like that, any one of them would have been newsworthy. The one unfolding off the Egyptian coast was of particular interest, because it illustrated two trends that were of concern to attendees at the time, namely, the growing number of boats leaving Egypt, as well as the increasing numbers of unauthorized Egyptians arriving in European Union member states.

So, after the initial news broke, journalists flocked to Rashid. At first, they kept the world up to date of the rising death toll, as well as the passengers' nationalities, most of whom turned out to be Egyptian indeed, with others being Sudanese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Syrian nationals[2]. However, in the days that followed, they published more elaborate pieces, painting an image of a slow and inadequate official response, of local fishermen saving people, of fishermen who became human smugglers after reduced fish stocks reduced their livelihood, and of local youth willing to risk their lives for the chance of a future in Europe[3].

In Europe, these stories fueled fears of unlimited migrations. Expressing her concern, the German chancellor Angela Merkel repeated her plea for an EU-Turkey like migration deal, according to which Egypt would 'take back' irregular migrants in return for the resettling of refugees stranded in Egypt[4]. This had been on the table before, but, at the time, it had been deemed unfeasible, because the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was already resettling refugees from Egypt, no matter how tediously slow. Accordingly, IOM Egypt issues a statement calling for the Egyptian government to pass an anti-trafficking law, and more generally, intensify cooperation on border control[5].

In Egypt, authorities were quick to respond, both to the sudden spotlight on shipwrecks, and to the international pressure. Within a week, the Egyptian police arrested the owner of

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/21/migrant-boat-capsizes-off-egyptian-coast

[2] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/23/death-toll-in-migrant-shipwreck-off-egypt-rises-to-300

[3] https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2016/10/10/egypt-boat-disaster-shines-light-new-migration-trend

[4] https://enterprise.press/stories/2016/09/27/merkel-says-eu-needs-turkey-style-agreement-with-egypt-tunisia/

[5] https://egypt.iom.int/news/iom-egypt-statement-rashid-shipwreck

the boat, seven of the surviving crew members, and fourteen of the fishermen who had rescued survivors and recovered dead bodies that day. In the meantime, only a day after the shipwreck, Egyptian president Abdel al Fatah al-Sisi appeared on national television to express his commitment to safeguarding Egypt's borders, and to call on society in general and Egyptian youth in particular to help prevent shipwrecks from happening. "Don't leave your country and go, you can develop it if you will, just join hands with us"[6], he said. Only two weeks later, president al-Sisi announced a new National Strategy to Combat Illegal Migration[7], while parliament suddenly passed a new anti-human trafficking law to deter smugglers and safeguard the rights and address the needs of those being smuggled. Another two months later, Egypt agreed to facilitate an EU funded, sixty million euro action program called Enhancing the Response to Migration Challenges in Egypt (ERMCE) to enhance Egypt's migration management, address the root causes of irregular migration, and support Egyptian communities hosting migrants and refugees[8]. And in the spring of 2017, German authorities convinced Egyptian authorities to facilitate the forced deportations of Egyptian citizens from Germany, in return for German funding for Egyptian counter terrorism and border security programs[9].

I was following all of this while preparing for, and actually conducting fieldwork with, Egyptians in Amsterdam. In November 2016, as part of my preparations, I met with my great cousin Hanne and her husband Paul. Hanne and Paul were not ones to dwell on the past, but when I asked Paul how he had travelled to the Netherlands, he was happy to explain to me how different things had been at the time. After Egyptian independence, he explained, Gamal Abdel Nasser restricted emigration in order to preserve Egyptian labor for the new Egyptian economy. So, when Paul had wanted to train at a Dutch engineering company, he had to get an exemption to leave the country. This had not been easy, he said, but after pulling some strings, he had managed to get the required stamps in his passport. After that, things had been easy. The Netherlands did not require him to carry a visa, and when he decided to stay, he had simply registered himself at the municipality in which he and Hanne were living at the time. "It was as simple as that," he concluded.

As he told the story, I could tell that Paul was out to teach me something, and he sure did.

[6]https://www.latimes.com/world/middleeast/la-fg-egypt-europe-migrants-snap-story.html

[7]https://www.iom.int/news/egypt-launches-new-national-strategy-combating-illegal-migration

[8]https://trust-fund-for-africa.europa.eu/our-programmes/enhancing-response-migration-challenges-egypt-ermce_en

[9]https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170828-egypt-german-cooperation-agreement-on-immigration-and-refugees/

I knew that Egypt men had needed permission to leave Egyptian, but as a child of the 1980s, I was oblivious to the fact that, once upon a time, citizens from a country like Egypt did not need a visa to travel to a country like the Netherlands. In this chapter, I juxtapose Paul's experience to the journeys of contemporary Egyptian travelers. I do so to describe how borders (re)produce racial inequality, namely, through the use of nationality as a proxy for race, how borders shape interpersonal relations, from relations between employers and employees to the relationships between spouses and parents and children, and how borders shape a sense of self, of the Other, and the world we live in.

1.1 Borders and how to navigate them

In the Introduction, I announced that contemporary borders work to facilitate the ongoing extraction of resources from former colonies, while preventing impoverished citizens of national liberation states to follow to where wealth is concentrating. In this section, I ground this more general insight in ethnographic accounts, before describing how contemporary borders shaped the journeys of Egyptian travelers whom I met in Cairo, Amsterdam, and elsewhere.

In her ethnography of Zarzis in present-day Tunisia, anthropologist Amade M'charek (2020) examines the production and reproduction of global apartheid by paying attention to the stories that Zarzis' landscape tell. One of those stories is the story of extraction. In the nineteenth century, the French colonial government authorized the extraction of salt and other minerals from the salt plains around Zarzis at an industrial scale. Today, French companies continue to extract salt and other minerals, and they do so under conditions that were negotiated at the dawn of Tunisian independence, leading to a situation in which French consumers pay a fraction of the price that Tunisian consumers pay for the same salt, that came from Tunisia in the first place. As elsewhere in the world, extraction and dispossession at an industrial scale have depleted and continue to deplete the areas around Zarzis, where it is now increasingly difficult to grow crops, or to fish. People are not literally dying, but they feel like they have nothing to live for, as "there are no jobs, no prospects; only the fear of things getting worse." (p. 422).

This sense of being stuck in life is one that is shared by aspiring young people across the world, and across former colonies in particular. Variously labelled as "stuckedness" (Hage, 2009), "impasse" (Berlant, 2011), or "limbo" (Jansen, 2015), this sense emerges when people feel unable to move forward within a normative system of values. 'Stuckedness' may engender boredom and feelings of shame and anger (Cvetkovich, 2012), but it also pushes people to reorient their affective attachments to new objects of hope, and actually engage in new future-oriented projects

(Miyazaki, 2005; Pedersen, 2012). For instance, in Cairo, taking up soft-skill and language courses induced feelings of being on the move again among un- and underemployed graduates (Pettit, 2018), while religious conversion renewed hope of redemption among Muslim converts to Pentecostalism in Kyrgyzstan (Pelkmans, 2013).

Mobility too has been conceptualized as a fix to existential immobility (Dzenovska, 2018; Ungruhe and Esson, 2017; Grill, 2012). As Ghassan Hage (2005: 470) puts it, "we engage in the kind of physical mobility that defines us as immigrants because we feel another geographical space is a better launching pad for our existential selves. We move physically so we can feel that we are existentially on the move again or at least moving better." This is particularly true for impoverished citizens of national liberation states, who are disillusioned with the future that national sovereignty brought about, and look to countries where wealth is concentrating as better launching pads for the existential selves, as Hage puts it so beautifully. However, as discussed in the introduction and repeated above, in the past decades, those very same countries have conspired to prevent impoverished citizens from the national liberation states from accessing safe routes. In their attempt to seek a new or viable life, these people now willfully embark on dangerous and potentially lethal journeys, precisely because they no longer feel they have anything to live for in the places in which they were before.

In the past two decades, Zarzis has become one of the points of departure for people who move in search of life in Europe. The journey they undertake is notoriously dangerous, and many of these life-seekers have actually drowned, and because of the Mediterranean currents, many of the bodies wash ashore Zarzis' bay, along with their luggage and other debris. Meanwhile, olive oil and sea-sponges produced in and around Zarzis are being shipped to Europe to be sold as "Italian" and "Cypriot" respectively, because unlike people, consumer goods can easily change identity, as least if the powers that be want it so. If they make it across the Mediterranean, unauthorized travelers risk encampment (Davies and Isakjee, 2019), illegalization (de Genova, 2002), and deportation (Kalir, 2019a).

In the face of this violence, in the last two decades, critical scholars have drawn on the work of Hannah Arendt (1951) and Giorgio Agamben (1998) to suggest that migration and immigration policies produce a contemporary homo sacer, or a people stripped of "the right to have rights" (e.g. Turner, 2016; Buckel and Wissel, 2010; Gill 2016; Doty, 2011). However, much like slavery, unequal mobility, encampment, illegalization, and deportation are sanctioned by extensive bodies of law, so that even encamped, illegalized, and deportable people have rights. Moreover, in the face of violence, people still make something of life, whether that is by travelling unauthorized, setting up businesses in camps (Betts et al, 2019), or growing vegetables in

detention centers (see the example of Saïed later on in this chapter). This is not to celebrate their resistance, but rather their will to live, and the fact that no system can ever succeed in controlling who lives, and how we live.

In her work on Zarzis, M'charek (2020) proposes to theorize the attempt of making something of life through illegalized migration through the emic term *harraga*. *Harraga* literally translates as burning. In Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, it is used to speak about illegalized migration, and refers specifically to the burning of identity papers. For M'charek, this term frames migration as an act rather than an identity, and the act of crossing borders as an attempt to metaphorically burn them and to build life out of the ashes. In Egyptian Arabic, *harraga* does not carry that same meaning. Instead, Egyptians use the verb *saffar*, which may be best translated as to travel, and less so, *hagar*, which translates as migration, which carries a more religious meaning, as it is used to talk about the prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina. As verbs, *saffar* and *hagar* also depict migration as an act, rather than an identity. However, they do not direct our attention to borders, and the attempt to transcend them in order to create life in the way that the *harraga* does.

In this chapter, I follow M'chareks suggestion to think with *harraga*, that is, to look at illegalized mobility as attempts to increase the possibilities of life. I do so by tracing Egyptian journeys to and in Amsterdam, a method that, as Joris Schapendonk and Griet Steel (2014) point out, is well suited to link people's expectations of and experiences with transnational mobility, and the mobility regimes that facilitate, slow down and block mobilities. Before doing so, I continue by providing a short overview of the history of Egyptian mobility to the Netherlands.

1.2 Dutch immigration, Egyptian emigration

The Netherlands and Egypt do not physically border one another, and there is no special relationship between the two countries, yet when juxtaposed to one another, Dutch immigration and Egyptian emigration policies appear to develop in response to one another. They did not, or at least not directly, but the apparent back and forth between Dutch immigration and Egyptian emigration policies is not a coincidence either. Rather, as I will highlight, it reflects the Netherlands' and Egypt's' respective positions in the emerging world order of nation-states.

After the Second World War, the Dutch authorities maintained that the Netherlands was a country of emigration, not of immigration. Yet, in addition to facilitating emigration, Dutch authorities also facilitated immigration, even if officials did not name it as such. In the years before and immediately after Indonesian independence (1949), the Dutch government facil-

itated the repatriation of those categorized as 'Europeans', while encouraging 'mixed-blood' 'Indo-Europeans' to stay in newly independent Indonesia, and many did. In the 1950s, Indonesian authorities began to push out non-Indonesians, pressuring Indo-Europeans to leave for the Dutch metropole, compelling the Dutch government to repatriate them. In 1951, the Dutch government also repatriated 'indigenous' Ambonese men who had fought along the Dutch in the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (KNIL) and were therefore also persecuted. In addition to repatriation, from 1949 onwards, subsequent Dutch governments also facilitated the recruitment and even actively recruited so-called 'guest-workers', initially from Italy, then from other Southern European countries, and later, in the 1960s, from Turkey and Morocco. From the 1960s onwards, more and more Dutch citizens from Dutch Surinam and the Dutch Antilles traveled to the metropole. In the Netherlands, European repatriates were treated as already Dutch, Indo-European repatriates were treated as adjustable, while Moluccans, Mediterranean guest-workers, and Surinamese and Antilleans were treated as guests who were only temporarily welcome (see Chapter Two for a more detailed description of this treatment).

Meanwhile, the Egyptian revolution for independence in 1952, President Gamal Abdel Nasser enforced a range of emigration restrictions in order to preserve Egyptian labor for the Egyptian economy. So, while European governments, including the Dutch government, were actively recruiting so-called 'guest-workers' from countries like Turkey and Morocco in the 1960s, Egyptian migration remained by and large an 'internal' or 'domestic' phenomenon (Zohry, 2002; 2009), with 'rural-to-urban' and 'urban-to-urban' migrants moving to Cairo, Alexandria, and the industrializing towns along the Suez Canal and in the Nile Delta to work and to get an education (J. Abu-Lughod, 1962: 23). On the back of this domestic migration, Nasser industrialized the country and built an extensive government apparatus, creating a pathway towards a middle class lifestyle for more and more Egyptians by creating (government) jobs, and by greatly improving access to affordable housing, education, and healthcare. Towards the end of the 1960s, Nasser's ambitious program no longer seemed tenable due to spiraling debts and an inordinate government apparatus (Waterbury, 1983). After his death in 1970, it was abandoned by President Anwar el-Sadat in favor of his so-called infitah policies, which opened the country to direct foreign investment and, in 1974, lifted all restrictions on emigration (Zohry, 2002).

In the Netherlands, the global economic crises of the early 1970s made it clear that at least some of the 'foreign guests' were there to stay. Alarmed, in 1974, the Dutch government formally terminated foreign recruitment programs, and one year later, in 1975, the government announced a full stop on labor migration, although in practice, workers who were seen as contributing to the Dutch economy were still exempted. In the same year, the Dutch government

also 'granted' independence to Surinam, in part in order to curb migration (Jones, 2016), although Surinamese citizens were still allowed to settle in the Netherlands until 1980, and many did. The full stop on labor migration did compel the Dutch government to formalize family reunification (Bonjour and Schrover, 2015), which many of the former guest-workers made use of, as well as asylum procedures (Bruquetas, et al 2011). This was the start of the visa system as we know it today.

Just as the Netherlands and other North-Western European countries were beginning to impose more serious travel restrictions, president Sadat eased limitations on emigration compelling aspiring Egyptians to move to the oil-producing Arab countries where demand for foreign labor appeared endless. In 1975, the year that the Netherlands formally ended labor migration, and one year after Sadat had lifted restrictions on Egyptian emigration, a staggering 370.000 Egyptians had already found their way to Libya, Kuwait, Iraq, and Saudi Arabic (Zohry 2006: 3). This further increased to over one million by 1980, peaking at 1.3 million in 1983, when demand for foreign labour began to dry up due to the Iraq-Iran war and subsequent oil-crises.

Sadat's successor, President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) continued to divest from public services under the banner of large scale structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and the World Bank (Mitchell, 2002; A. de Koning, 2009). These policies were supposed to transform Egypt into a liberal free-market economy. However, while they may have contributed to Egypt's GDP growth, which averaged around five percent between the late 1970s and late 2000s, they also split the Egyptian middle-classes into a cosmopolitan upper middle-class with access to visas (A. de Koning, 2009), and the so-called middle-class poor without (Bayat, 2003; Pettit, 2023).

As demand for so-called unskilled labor in the wealthy Arab countries was decreasing, Egyptians were beginning to take alternative routes to Europe. On paper, the Netherlands and Europe more generally were already off limits as places to travel to for work, but at the time, tourist visas were still relatively easy to obtain. In the Netherlands, residency was not yet linked to the right to work or access social services. As I learned when I started to talk to the Egyptians I met about their first years in the Netherlands, this meant that not only authorized tourists, but even illegalized people were legally allowed to work, and even paid taxes. As someone who came of age afterwards, this was not only new to me, but something I would not even have thought possible.

Then, in 1995, the Dutch government introduced the linking act (*koppelingswet*), which was going to link residential status to the right to work and access public services like schools,

social housing, welfare, and non-emergency healthcare, with the explicit aim of discouraging unauthorized migrants from trying to settle in the Netherlands and to push out those who had already done or would nevertheless do so in the future (van der Leun, 2002; 2003). In response, illegalized people in the Netherlands found other ways to legalize their stay, such as getting married to Dutch or EU citizens, which in the Netherlands became known as *schijnhuwelijken*, or 'sham-marriages'. This icon of sham marriages spurred Dutch authorities to defer the transmission of citizenship to five years, while also trying to unmask so-called 'sham marriages' through unannounced visits to marital homes

In the same year, the Netherlands joined the Schengen treaty that opened up some of the European Union's internal borders. In response, Egyptians began to acquire counterfeit passports and visas; however, while developing the contemporary infrastructure of airports and passenger planes, authorities of wealthy countries like the Netherlands also innovated passports and visas as part and parcel of a larger attempt to keep out unauthorized travelers. This attempt further included the building of walls and fences (Brown, 2020) and the introduction of carrier fines, which turn air carriers into border agents, and effectively externalizes borders (Spijkerboer, 2018).

Thomas Spijkerboer (2018) emphasizes that these measures effectively block access to safe routes, quoting that today, less than one percent of the people who arrive in Europe unauthorized arrive by plane. The others take boats across the Mediterranean or cross land borders, for example between Turkey and Greece, Belarus and Poland, or Russia and Finland. Some of these people travel onwards, but they form a small minority among the non-nationals who move to and settle in the Netherlands, the vast majority of whom are citizens from other EU countries. Still, political debates continue to focus on so-called family reunification, asylum seekers, and especially so-called *gelukszoekers* (fortune seekers), a phrase which is used to indicate that people have no valid purpose to come to the Netherlands. The Egyptian men with whom I worked would have certainly been labelled as such, and in fact, in Egypt, migration is indeed scripted like this, as a way to look for a better life. In the next section, I describe the more specific images of migration to the Netherlands through the movie *hamam fi Amsterdam*, Hamam in Amsterdam.

1.3 Imagining migration

In Egypt, migration to the Netherlands is first and foremost imagined through the movie Hamam fi Amsterdam. Hamam fi Amsterdam was an immediate hit when it was released in 1999 and

when I began to spend time in Cairo in 2013, people would still bring the movie up when I told them I lived in Amsterdam. Hamam fi Amsterdam tells the story of Hamam, a young man from one of Cairo's *shaabi* or 'popular' neighborhoods. Hamam is madly in love with the girl next door. He asks for her hand, but when her parents find out that he has no money to speak of, they cold-heartedly tell him to only return with a serious offer. Hamam decides that his best chance is to work abroad. He discusses the idea with his mother, who agrees with him, and encourages him to visit her brother, who had settled in Amsterdam years earlier. Hamam optimistically applies for a visa but is rejected. For a moment, it seems like Hamam will give up, but then his friends and family members show up to lend him some money to buy a visa. Hamam buys a visa from some hash-smoking thugs, but when he returns, his cousin tells him that it does not look like a real visa at all. His cousin bravely helps him get his money back, and to get a better looking visa. All set to travel, Hamam spends his last night nostalgically looking out on the street where he grew up when suddenly a wedding parade comes by, and it turns out the girl next door has just married a local businessman.

The next day, Hamam's passport gets him on the plane and through customs. However, when he wants to pay the taxi that took him to the city center, he notices that he has lost his money and uncle's address. Alone and lost in the streets, Hamam enters a bar. Inside, women are dancing and men are drinking beers and shots. Overwhelmed, Hamam accepts an orange juice from a waitress. She asks to pay, but he says he has not ordered anything. She sighs, and orders security guards to step in. Hamam shouts and screams in Arabic, and out of nowhere, a strongly built man in a tight t-shirt and motorbike trousers beats up the guards and pulls Hamam out. Outside, the man gets on his motorbike, and after his girlfriend joins him, he introduces himself in Egyptian Arabic as Adriano. Hamam makes it clear that he has nowhere to go, and Adriano tells him to hop on as well.

At home, Adriano takes off his shirt for a shower, but his girlfriend beats him to it, saying, no, no, me first (nee, nee, ik eerst). As Adriano turns around to face Hamam, it appears that he is wearing a Coptic cross. Hamam seems taken aback, but then declares that Jesus and Moses are prophets too, and Adriano and Hamam amiably sit down. After they have both taken a shower, Adriano and his girlfriend go out again, to another party. Outside, they get confronted by the people from the bar, and it appears that Adriano is in some dirty business with them.

The next day, Adriano finds Hammam's uncle, who happens to live in a huge and luxurious house. Hamam's uncle welcomes him, but not too warmly. In the background, Dutch speakers hear his wife sigh, *weer een familielid*, another family member. Over dinner, Hamam and his uncle annoy the uncle's wife by speaking Arabic, a language she does not speak or understand.

After dinner, she tells her husband to tell Hamam that he can only stay for one night, which he dutifully does. In the middle of the night, Hamam witnesses a fight between his uncle and his uncle's daughter, who wants to go out and have a sleepover with a group of friends, including a boy who has taken an interest in her. Hamam's uncle does not want her to go, but his wife says its fine, and their daughter goes out anyway.

The next morning, Adriano finds Hamam a room in a shared apartment and a cleaning job at a hotel. Hamam's flatmates are identified as falaheen, simple men from the countryside who seem ill-equipped for city-life, but are lighthearted and trustworthy. At work, a Moroccan-Dutch woman helps him settle in, but after his Jewish colleague sets him up, he gets fired. Hamam moves from one menial job to another, and in the meantime, falls in love with the Dutch Moroccan woman whom he had met at his first job. They get married. Together, they open a food-truck selling French fries, which earns them enough money to put down a bid on Toscanini, a high-end restaurant in which Hamam used to wait tables. Hamam seems to win the auction, until his Jewish ex-colleague comes in and outbids him. Hamam is about to give up, but then his uncle shows up to provide him with some extra money, and Hamam wins the auction after all. The movie ends as Hamam, his wife, and their new-born son travel to Egypt, where they meet Hamam's mother at the airport.

The first time I watched Hamam fi Amsterdam, I was thrown off by the unabashed stereotyping of Copts and Jews, as well Dutch women, the Netherlands and the West in general (for a more general discussion on these stereotypes, see Shafik, 2007: 84-87, respectively Woltering, 2011: 135-136). However, while spending time with aspiring Egyptians in Cairo and Amsterdam, I began to see Hamam fi Amsterdam as reflecting the material and ideational conditions under which Egyptians move to and build lives in the Netherlands.

In Egypt, and across national liberation states, promises of betterment on the one hand, and ongoing precarization on the other, have created a discrepancy between what people aspire to and what life offers them. In the 1990s, this manifested most sharply in a gap between expectations of the groom to finance the wedding and marital life and the groom's inability to do so. Diane Singerman (2007: 38) explains that this not only led to the delay of marriage, but, in the Egyptian context, also to the proliferation of 'waithood' or a liminal state between child- and adulthood in which men and women are waiting to negotiate their identity vis-à-vis religious movements, nationalist and developmentalist rhetoric, and neoliberal frameworks (cf. Honwana, 2012). This was the predicament that Hamam found himself in, and at the time, moving to work in a wealthy country was seen as a viable way forward in life (Pettit and Ruijtenberg, 2019).

In the decades prior to the release of Hamam fi Amsterdam, millions of Egyptians left the country. As mentioned, they primarily moved to oil-producing Arab countries such a Libya, Iraq, and Saudi-Arabia, but also to Southern European countries such as Italy and France, as well as Canada and the USA (Zohry, 2007). In Egypt, these acts of moving and settling were generally read as travelling to work in a wealthy country in order to finance a middle-class lifestyle back at home (Schielke, 2020; Pettit and Ruijtenberg, 2019). However, as the difference between Hamam's flatmates and his uncle suggests, Egyptians were also well aware that moving and settling in a city like Amsterdam involved radically different things for differently situated people. In the meantime, from an Egyptian perspective, aforementioned transformations in the Netherlands turned the Netherlands into a particularly hard to reach and morally hazardous country to stay in, but also into a place where hard and smart work still pays off, as Hamam fi Amsterdam illustrates.

Against these backdrops, Hamam fi Amsterdam depicts moving to and settling in Amsterdam as something of a rite of passage (for a similar analysis based on fieldwork with Afghans in Iran, see Monsutti, 2007). In this light, Hamam's attempt to obtain a visa and his eventual departure mark the end of his boyhood, where late night bars, Dutch women, and menial work appear as tests through which he may prove his moral character, while his triumphant return to Cairo marks his reincorporation into Egyptian society as an adult man. Hamam makes it through this rite of passage without falling victim to the temptations, as Adriano had done, and without losing his values, as his uncle had done. That said, even for people like Adriano and Hamam's uncle, redemption remains possible.

This script of migration as a rite of passage for adolescent men depicts Dutch women as moral hazards, Egyptian mothers as supporting their sons' attempt to make a living abroad, and Egyptian wives as either following their husbands to a foreign land or as staying in Egypt to raise the children. In addition to leaving out women who travel on their own account, with their own dreams and desires, the script also leaves out (married) men who travel for other reasons then to work, such as men fleeing political persecution. This reflects the fact that, in Egypt, women were and still are discouraged from travelling unchaperoned, and that it has been and still is dangerous to suggest that people may flee from political persecution. By leaving Egypt, already persecuted people face additional risks. For example, out of a legitimate fear of repercussions, many people who flee Egypt may choose to avoid contact with their loved ones, while women on the move risk harassment and sexual abuse. In the next sections, I describe these hurdles through the actual journeys of people I met.

1.4 Getting stuck in Egypt

In the years that I lived in Cairo, I was not necessarily interested in questions of migration. However, many of the young men and women I met expressed an interest in travelling to study or work in Europe or the US, and I was frequently asked to practice English or help them apply for visas, scholarships, university programs, or jobs. I often agreed, and in the process, I vicariously experienced the oscillation between the hope of getting ahead in life and the frustration of getting stuck again that these unsuccessful applications bring about. The story of Mostafa illustrates this oscillation. I tell his story here, in order to attribute this oscillation to the (existential) mobility regimes structuring the lives of men and women like him.

In October 2015, Mostafa met a friend of mine, and when he heard about me, he asked our common friend to ask me to become his language exchange partner. I was dissatisfied with the progress that I was making in my Arabic classes, and so I agreed to meet him for a cup of tea. That first night, we did not really understand each other, but we got along, and so we agreed to give it a try. In the weeks and months that followed, Mostafa enthusiastically pushed me to meet three, four, or even five times a week. We met in coffeehouses across Cairo or in the apartment he shared with three other men in one of the popular neighborhoods in Giza, but never in my place, which was in a more middle-class neighborhood, and in which Mostafa did not feel comfortable. When we spoke English, Mostafa meticulously wrote down the new words he was learning, and when we spoke Arabic, he expected me to do the same, and tirelessly made me repeat the words I was mispronouncing. After a few weeks, our conversations began to expand, and if it was not for Mostafa's commitment, I would not have been able to conduct my fieldwork in Arabic in the Netherlands as effectively as I did.

As our ability to express ourselves increased, our conversations grew more intimate. We began to speak about growing up, about our parents, siblings, and other family members, and mostly our goals and dreams in life. He spoke poetically, using metaphors and figures of speech to narrate his life as a series of disillusions that taught him how the world worked and made him determined to make it. Mostafa told me he first wanted to make a career in the army, but found out the hard way that a son of his father did not stand a chance. He then moved to Cairo to pursue a corporate career, in the hope that corporations select on merit rather than family and class background. In Cairo, he applied to different entry-level jobs, but was swiftly rejected, which taught him that his university education had not provided him with the skills that he needed to get such a job. He also learned that the only jobs available to him were call-center jobs and poorly paid government jobs. He chose the former, to at least work in the corporate world.

After a few months, he began to see that for many of his peers, call centers were not a stepping stone, and understood that to get ahead in life, he would have to study in Europe or the US. He applied for several foreign scholarships, most notably the Chevening scholarship, which is meant to enable young leaders and professionals from across the world to undertake a master's degree in the UK. He got rejected every time and learned that, to become eligible for this kind of scholarship, he needed to improve his CV, which he was trying to do when I met him.

At the time, Mostafa focused on getting a higher-status job and on acquiring diplomas and certificates that he hoped would make him eligible for the scholarships and programs he wanted to apply to. He had just accepted a job at a small-scale accountancy firm, which paid less than what he was making in the call center, but which he said would lead him to Europe. He was also following two post-graduate courses, one on human resource management and one on business development. According to Mostafa, these courses confirmed that he had not learned anything at university. On a couple of occasions, he told me that he felt like he was finally learning how to roll a heavy rock instead of trying to carry it. He also continued to apply for scholarships and master programs, initially mostly in the UK, but after he met me, also in the Netherlands.

The process of applying for university programs and scholarships renewed Mostafa's hope for a better future, but the rejections that would invariably follow made him feel stuck in life. Mostafa usually notified me of another rejection with a mere screenshot, and after that would disappear for a few days. In hindsight I think that, perhaps, at those moments, the gap between our worlds was too wide for him to bridge, and I perhaps was not yet able to do so either. By the time he was ready to reengage with me, he would already be looking for new courses to take, and new scholarships to apply to, that is, to continue the search for a life worth living as he saw it.

Mostafa was one of many young university graduates who soon after graduation found out that his university degree did not give him access to the kind of career he had imagined for himself. Disillusioned, he and young men like him began to imagine further education in Europe as a pathway to that career, only to learn that they were ineligible for European programs, and thus European student visa. We do not always think of university programs and scholarships as part and parcel of European borders. However, when people need to show an acceptance letter and proof of sufficient funds in order to acquire a student visa, and when universities require foreign students to be authorized to stay in the country, they are.

For someone like Mostafa to claim belonging in cosmopolitan Cairo and European universities was to challenge a status quo in which people like him are structurally excluded by virtue of various formal and informal eligibility criteria. That said, Mostafa did not aspire to change the

world. Quite to the contrary, he wanted to keep the world as it was, but change his position in it. He loathed the idea of leaving Egypt, and dreamed of one day returning as a learned man who could help his country develop. So, he held on to the idea that people can actually climb social ladders, and believed that Egypt is underdeveloped because of a lack of learned people. Paradoxically, this set of ideas originates in and in turn animates the systems that kept Mostafa aspiring, but prevented him from taking any significant steps towards fulfilling his dreams. Indeed, Mostafa's narrative was not too different from the narratives expressed in structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and the WTO, which attribute Egypt's lack of development to a lack of knowhow, while actually eroding public education. Multinational companies promise to hire meritocratically, but actually prioritize people who graduate from the kind of private universities that Mostafa could not afford, which is to say that they select on class. The Chevening scholarship defines its impact as creating positive, lasting change, but in countries like Egypt, the primary beneficiaries are elite students, suggesting that in such a context, it actually contributes to maintaining inequalities.

In Europe, politicians promote bordering as a way to prevent brain-drain, while in practice borders actually drain brains by preventing people like Mostafa from pursuing an education. Mostafa knew all of this, and in moments of rejection, he would make similar points. However, in the process of applying again, he would instead reproduce the language of meritocracy again, not because he suddenly forgot his critical takes, but rather, because he was not ready to give up hope yet.

1.5 Dutch visas and how to acquire them

In the fall of 2016, I travelled to Cairo to improve my Arabic and to conduct fieldwork with Egyptian citizens of the Netherlands who had returned to Cairo (see Chapter Four). Mostafa and I picked up where we had left things, and I soon found out that, in the meantime, he had fallen in love with a Dutch woman. A few weeks later, while I was still in Cairo, he got engaged to her. After that, he increasingly focused on the Netherlands as a destination. He began to study Dutch at the Dutch and Flemish Institute in Cairo (NVIC). Together, we investigated Dutch visa regulations. We found out that the Dutch authorities only grant work visas to "high-skilled workers", defined at the time by a salary of over €51,239 gross (or €37,575 if under the age of 30), and indispensable workers, that is, people who carry out work for which there are no Dutch or EU citizens available. We both realized Mostafa would not be able to get a job like that, so instead, we focused on a student visa. We found out that the Dutch authorities

only grant student visas to students from outside the EU if they can prove that they can pay for their program. On his Egyptian income, and without access to money, Mostafa could not do that. Instead, he put his hopes on a scholarship. I was skeptical, but Mostafa's enthusiasm was contagious and sometimes I found myself thinking that maybe, this time, he would succeed. But no matter how much effort we put into his applications, he never did.

After yet another rejection, I suggested postponing traveling until after his marriage, but this greatly upset him, and he did not talk to me for a few days. When he reached out again, he told me that this was a last resort. How could he get married to someone without meeting her family and seeing the country where she came from, Mostafa asked rhetorically, and I felt silly for even suggesting. Later, when the dust between us had settled, Mostafa explained that he wanted to travel on his own account, in part because he wanted to distinguish his marriage from the marriages between Egyptian men and European women in Egypt's tourist resorts, which are often framed as a license to have sex (Karkabi, 2011) or as a ticket to Europe (Sportel 2016), and in part because he was afraid of what lay ahead for him as a "dependent spouse". To explain this to me, he shared the story of his friend, Ahmed. Apparently, Ahmed had conducted a so-called urfi or customary marriage with a Dutch woman in Sharm al Sheikh. These marriages are not recognized by the Egyptian or Dutch state, so despite his marriage, Ahmed was not eligible for a spousal visa. Somehow – Mostafa did not know how exactly – Ahmed managed to travel to the Netherlands anyway. In the Netherlands, Ahmed's wife got pregnant. A few months after she gave birth to a boy, they separated, leaving Ahmed alone on the street without a valid visa. He was swiftly arrested, and despite being the biological father of a Dutch citizen, he was ordered to leave the country, which he did. "Can this happen, Wiebe?" Mostafa asked, and I had to tell him that it could. The next day, Mostafa actually brought Ahmed along. Speaking in Dutch, he told me his story in more detail, adding specific dates, names of places and people, as well as details of the events that had let to their break-up, as if he was already trained to tell his story in that way. This might have been the case, as the Dutch Immigration and Naturalizations Services (IND) requires people to be as specific and consistent as they can. Later that evening, Mostafa called me to ask whether I believed Ahmed's story, and I told him that, for me, the important thing was that it could be true.

In October 2016, I left Egypt again, to finish my research proposal and to begin fieldwork in Amsterdam. A few weeks later, in early November, Mostafa called me. We often spoke on the phone those days, but this time, I felt that he was nervous, so after chit-chatting for about fifteen minutes, I asked him what was on his mind. He sighed, and admitted he had a favor to ask. He wanted to travel to the Netherlands to spend Christmas with his fiancé and her family, but did

not want to apply for a visa through her, he said. Anticipating the question he was trying to ask, I offered to sponsor his trip. The next day, I went to the Amsterdam municipality office. After completing the required paperwork and paying 11 euro's, I received a letter with stamps and a signature stating that I was inviting Mostafa to stay with me, that I would pay for his expenses, and guarantee his return. I sent the letter and proof of my income to a friend who was travelling to Cairo, who gave it to Mostafa, who in turned submitted it as part of his visa application. Yet, a month later, Mostafa received a standardized rejection letter, saying that he had not provided sufficient evidence of his connections to Egypt, casting doubt over his intention to return to Egypt. I was not surprised, but Mostafa was baffled. If he was not connected to Egypt, then where was he connected to? That Christmas, Mostafa joined his fiancé's family over Skype.

After that experience, Mostafa decided to forego the idea of travelling and instead refocused on building his career in Egypt, and as I was focusing on fieldwork in the Netherlands myself, we slowly lost touch. He did, however, keep me updated on some of the developments in his life: in the summer of 2018, Mostafa told me he and his fiancé were getting married under Egyptian law, and a few days later, I received some pictures from their honeymoon in Alexandria. In the spring of 2019, he told me that his wife moved to Belgium to apply for family reunification under European Union law, which in these cases is more forthcoming than Dutch law. In the summer of 2019 he told me he had received a short stay Schengen visa to visit family. In December 2019, he travelled to Belgium.

A few days later, he and his wife traveled to the Netherlands to celebrate the holidays with her family. Shyly, he asked me if we could perhaps meet too. We agreed to meet on Boxing Day, in front of Amsterdam Central Station. I was fifteen minutes early, but he was earlier. I ran over to him, we hugged, kissed each other on the cheeks, and hugged again, while squeezing each other in the arms and exchanging pleasantries. I asked him if there was anything he wanted to see and he said he wanted to see Hamam's Amsterdam. I grinned at the memory of watching that movie with him again and again. I asked him what stood out for him, and he mentioned the pigeons on Dam square, the canals, and the restaurant Hamam worked at and ends up buying.

As we walked from Central Station to Dam Square, we continued to tell each other how excited we were to see each other, until I asked him about his first experiences. He told me that, before anything else, the cold had surprised him. When he stepped out of the plane, he felt like he hit an ice wall, he said, laughing at the memory. I spent all my money on this new jacket, he said, gesturing me to have a look at his purchase. The second thing he noticed was that he was not wanted here. "I am sorry, Wiebe, but it's true," he said. He had known that before travelling, but at customs, they had taken him apart, and would not let him go until he called

his wife. I am nothing here without her, he said, resignedly. Still, it felt good to be together, he said, even if they lived in a small studio of 40 square meters.

Meanwhile, we arrived at Dam Square, where the pigeons were exactly as Mostafa had imagined them. We stayed for at least an hour, feeding the pigeons, while watching the live statues and a protest against the Iranian government. From Dam Square, we walked to the Herengracht, which Mostafa said looked just like it did in hamam fi amsterdam. I admitted that I did not know which restaurant Hamam had bought, and proposed to go for hot chocolates. Inside the café, we struggled to make conversation. I asked about Christmas with his family-in-law, and he said that they had been really nice to him. He asked about my siblings, and I told him they were well. I asked him about his plans for the upcoming three months. He told me that he was not allowed to do work or enroll in university, and after the jacket, did not have the money to participate in consumer society. He laughed, but I could feel his pain. After about fifteen minutes of stunted conversations like that, he said he had to leave for another family dinner. As we said our goodbyes, he said that he still did not feel like he was in Europe, which I think was his way of saying that he did not yet feel existentially on the move.

Mostafa and people like him had clear ideas about which long-stay visa were good, and which ones were even better. Asylum was right down at the bottom and a high-skilled worker visa was the best visa out there. In this spectrum, being a dependent spouse was only slightly better than a refugee, because it quite literally signified dependency on someone middle-class, rather than having become middle-class oneself. Student visas were only slightly less good than high-skilled worker visas. This corresponds with the way in which these visas are regarded in the Netherlands, where asylum seekers and dependent spouses are stigmatized, while high-skilled workers are perceived as expats who contribute to the national economy.

In the early years of our relationship, Mostafa presented himself as focused and judging others as lazy. In Egypt, this trope is routinely evoked to explain why young men like Mostafa are not getting married. To a degree, Mostafa was right. He was particularly focused, and probably invested more in his dreams than anyone else I knew in Cairo. However, over time, Mostafa learned that hard work alone does not guarantee access to corporate jobs or transnational mobility. Indeed, Mostafa was not rejected from the jobs, scholarships, university programs, and visa that he applied for because he did not work hard enough, but rather because he lacked certificates to prove that he had the required skills, social connections in the echelons he was trying to enter, and money to buy the things he wanted.

Mostafa learned this in part through me and my students at the Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences where I was teaching when I met him. Over the years, many of these students

obtained long-term Schengen visas, either because their families had money to support their studies, because they carried enough cultural capital to secure a scholarship, or because their university degrees gave them access to high-earning jobs. Mostafa often asked after my students, and when I would tell him a story like that, he would simply say *shuuf ezzay*, do you see how? Of course, my own travel contrasted even starker with Mostafa's. Indeed, in the years that we were close, in addition to travelling to Cairo, I travelled to international conferences, visited (Egyptian) friends across Europe, and joined my partner in the United States. I can only imagine how my mobility made him feel. This is not to say that my students or I were not working hard, but rather, that we were already in a position in which our hard work mattered, or, put differently, because these systems are set up to reward people like me, and to keep out people like Mostafa. These systems are not watertight, in the sense that sometimes, people like Mostafa make it, against the odds, which may explain why young people like him continue to pursue their dreams despite the risk of new frustrations. Mostafa had to settle for less, as he put it. Still, he managed to avoid travelling unauthorized, as well as illegalization.

1.6 Travelling unauthorized

The vast majority of Egyptians are unable to acquire visa to travel to the Netherlands, so those who are rejected may seek alternative ways. There are basically two options. The first option is to acquire a 'fake' visa or passport, and I use quotation marks here to question what makes a visa or a passport real or not. This is what Hamam did, but since the release of that movie, this has become a lot harder though not entirely impossible. The second option is to enter Europe covertly, for example by crossing the Mediterranean Sea, which is incredibly dangerous, but which more and more Egyptians do. In this section, I begin to tell the story of Saïed, who travelled to the Netherlands on a Spanish passport that he bought in Malaysia.

In the summer of 2017, a friend asked me to meet Saïed who apparently was being detained in an immigration detention center near Schiphol airport. I did not quite know what to expect, but nevertheless agreed, because I trusted my friend. A week later, my friend and I cycled to the detention center, which turned out to be a couple of concrete buildings, surrounded by high walls, barbed wire, and cameras in the middle of empty fields. Intimidated, I sheepishly followed my friend through the huge but empty lobby. At the reception desk, we were asked to identify ourselves and instructed to leave everything we were carrying in a locker, including and especially our phones and other recording devices, such as pens and paper. After passing through metal detection gates, we were led to a large, white room, separated into two by a long,

table-like structure: one side for detainees and one side for visitors. After about five minutes, Saïed was brought in by a guard. My friend hugged him, I shook his hand, and we sat down to talk, quietly, in English, and then more animatedly in Arabic, under the watchful eyes of two guards. I imagined he already had had to share his story with many strangers before, so I refrained from asking him much, but, as I described in the Introduction, Saïed was actually eager to finally tell his story in Arabic.

Saïed told me he was born into a political family and had been politically active himself since his late teens. In the summer of 2013, Saïed participated in protests in Cairo for several weeks on end, but one day, he went to his home town in the Nile Delta to celebrate his daughter's birthday. As it happened, on that day, Egyptian security forces swept the protests his family members were participating in, killing over a thousand, among them Saïed's father, and arresting many more, including Saïed's brother. In shock, Saïed borrowed his friend's passport, and bought a ticket to Malaysia, one of the few countries for which Egyptians do not need a visa. The next day, he managed to get through customs. In absentia, Saïed was sentenced to ten years in prison.

In Malaysia, Saïed struggled. He was mourning his late father, worried about his brother, who was in prison, and his wife and two children, who not only had to deal with his absence, but also risked retaliation for his political activities. He tried to build a new life, with the aim of bringing his family over. After a year of failed attempts, he decided to move on. He bought a Malaysian passport, and moved to South Korea, one of the few wealthy countries that Malaysians did not need a visa for at the time. In South Korea, he began trading cars. He was relatively successful: he made good money, and moved into a family apartment. However, after researching South Korean migration and immigration laws, he concluded that his wife and children would not be able to join him, and so he decided to move again. He was able to buy a Spanish passport, and decided to try to travel to Johannesburg, South Africa, and from there to Auckland, New Zealand, because he had heard that he would not have to show a visa that way. However, when at the gate in Johannesburg, he was asked for a visa, and subsequently prevented from boarding. In panic, he looked for the first flight to Europe, to which he had access thanks to his Spanish passport. The first flight happened to be one to Amsterdam. He had never considered travelling there, but, on the internet, he read that Dutch children were among the happiest in the world, which he felt could only mean good things. He bought a ticket, was not picked out of the line, and entered the plane. As the plane took off, he felt relief.

At Schiphol Airport, Saïed approached the first official he saw, and announced that he wanted to apply for asylum. He was taken to an office, where he was questioned and stripped to his underwear. After what felt like an eternity, he was taken to a van, and driven to a building. It was

only when he entered a cell that he realized that he was in prison. In prison, he was treated like garbage, he said, *zay zibaala*. He could only receive visitors for two hours a week (excluding his lawyer). He only had access to the internet ten minutes a week, and the connection did not always work. He could use the phone, but had to pay for it. He did call his wife every now and then, but, in order not to worry her too much, he did not tell her where he was. According to the rules and regulations, he and the other people in the facility had a right to half an hour outdoors time per day, but it was always cut short. They should have access to books, but they did not. They had to buy their food in the little shop, but there was limited choice and everything was incredibly expensive. He was denied basic medical treatment, which was dangerous, because he suffered from diabetes. "I fled Egypt to find refuge from political persecution, only to have my rights violated in the Netherlands", he said, chuckling, revealing a dark sense of humor.

Saïed fought back, just as he did in Egypt, he said. He talked to the manager, filed complaints, and started to grow his own vegetables. He had success, too. After talking to the manager, he managed to actually get half an hour of outdoors time, and unlimited access to the library, where he began to learn some Dutch. However, in retaliation, the guards destroyed his garden and beat him up. He was taken to the hospital, in handcuffs, as if he was the criminal, and not the guards who were retaliating against him. The guard who beat him up did get suspended for a week. Still, he was hopeful, Saïed said. A few days earlier, his state-appointed lawyer told him she was trying to get him released on medical grounds. If she were to succeed, Saïed would not have any rights, but, at least, he could leave the country again. I do not want to be in a country that can treat people like this, he said. Then the hour was over, and it was time to leave. I am ashamed to admit it, but I felt relieved, because Saïed's story shook me to my core. I could not believe that a man was held in a prison like that without committing a crime, and in addition was treated in the way he was. This of course says something about my own lack of awareness of the actual state of affairs for illegalized and deportable people in the Netherlands, but until today, I am enraged about the practice.

Saïed imagined the Netherlands as a place where human and citizen rights are respected. Accordingly, when he arrived, he expected to find refuge, even though he had to travel illicitly to do so, which according to Saïed infringed on his right to seek refuge. However, instead of refuge, he found out that, by virtue of applying for asylum before customs, he had become deportable (Wissink, 2021). This was hard for him, and me, to fathom, and at that moment, it led him to say that he would leave the country as soon as he had the chance.

In Egypt and the Netherlands, Saïed took recourse in relevant laws and regulations to fight for his right. This reflects a firm belief in rights and regulations. In this light, it may seem ironic

or even hypocritical that he decided to break the law by acquiring a counterfeit passport, but for him, it was not so. Instead, acquiring a counterfeit passport was a way to claim rights, rather than to break the law.

1.7 Navigating illegalization

The majority of men with whom I worked were illegalized at some point in their lives in the Netherlands. Prior to the so-called linking act, which came into effect in 1998 and linked residency status to the right to work and access education and social services, being illegalized did not have such profound consequences, as people were still allowed to work and enjoyed work-based social rights. However, the linking act created what in the United Kingdom would later be called a hostile environment, and in the decades that followed, this already hostile environment has been made more hostile through further restricting services, and investing in a deportation apparatus. I explore what it is like to be illegalized through the story of Anastasia, who was one of the few illegalized women I met, to show that illegalizing people not only deprives them of basic needs, but establishes a class of exploitable people.

I met Anastasia in 2016 through a common friend in Egypt, whom I had told about my upcoming PhD research, and who connected me to her friend, who, she said, lived in the Netherlands. When I returned to the Netherlands, to start my PhD, I got in touch with her. We started hanging out. We usually met somewhere in the city center, just before or after she finished her shift in the restaurant she was working. Depending on the time of the day, we would have a coffee or a glass of red wine. She always smoked a cigarette or two. Sometimes, she also smoked a joint, which she said helped her sleep at night. Over coffee and wine, she let me in on her life in Amsterdam.

As a teenager, Anastasia felt that her future as a Coptic girl in Egypt was set. She was meant to get married, have children, and care for them and her husband. "But this is not a future", she told me, dismissively. At the age of 17, she travelled to Italy. She never gave me any details, but she did say she comes from a family of means, so I assume she just travelled on a tourist visa, which is also easier to obtain for young women than for young men. Anastasia was determined to stay, though. By virtue of her age, Italian authorities labeled her an "unaccompanied minor" which meant that she was "unremovable", and eligible for a residence permit for foster care (cf Accorintini 2015: 62). As a way to 'foster', she was put in a shelter for unaccompanied minors, where she was supposed to go to school as well. However, like most unaccompanied minors of her age, she focused on working, in her case in an Egyptian owned Italian restaurant, where she

made some money, and learned to speak Italian.

Per Italian law, when she turned 18, Anastasia's residence permit for minors was converted into a residence permit to study or work. To keep this permit, she had to enroll in a school or university, or work and pay taxes. Unlike most others in her situation, she managed to find formal employment, as a waitress in a restaurant. At the time, she felt like she would never leave. She loved Italian people, and felt like one of them. "They are like us, you know", she said. "Warm-blooded", she explained, pinching her fingers to make a stereotypical Italian hand gesture. However, her pay was low, and, looking around, she began to realize there was no future for her in Italy, either. "As a matter of fact", she added, "there is not even a future for Italians". Feeling stuck again, she reached out to the young men who she knew from her time in foster care, and who, after turning eighteen, had moved on, towards Northern Europe. One of them invited her to come to Amsterdam. Before she left, she set up a company in Italy, through which she would continue to pay taxes in Italy, which was the only requirement to keep her Italian residency permit, she explained.

As an Italian resident, Anastasia had access to mobility within the Schengen Area. However, by law, she was not allowed to work or access public welfare and healthcare services in any of the European Economic Area member states other than the one in which she legally resided. If she would nevertheless register as a resident in the Netherlands, apply for welfare services, or be caught working without a permit, she could be sent back to Italy, and in Italy, she could lose her residency permit for violating the conditions on which it was granted. The young man who had invited her did find her a place to stay and a job at an Egyptian owned and run cleaning agency. But her employer and landlord risked serious fines, and the fact that they took this risk may be read as a form of support and solidarity. At the same time, they also took advantage of her precarious legal status, by making her work seven days a week, ten hours a day for less than €1,000 a month, and by charging her €350 for a 12m2 room that she shared with another woman, which at the time was still something that only people who had nowhere else to go would pay. Still, the job and room were the only things she had, and as she knew well, she could lose them overnight.

Illegalization renders anyone vulnerable, but in a world dominated by men, young women like Anastasia are extra vulnerable. Though Anastasia rarely complained, one time, I saw her being harassed by one of her colleagues, and when I asked her about it, she told me that at one of the many jobs she had after arriving in the Netherlands, her employer had sexually abused her. She was waiting for the day that she had legal status, she said, so that she could finally report him and get her revenge.

By the time I met her, Anastasia was still illegalized, but in a much better place. After having worked for almost every Egyptian in town, as she used to joke, she had found work as a waitress at a much more upscale Egyptian-run Italian restaurant, where she was expected to perform Italianness, which she did with flair. She was well known and loved among the (illegalized) Egyptians working in the city center. Her life was hard, but, whenever I asked her about the hardships, she would tell me that although things were hard, she worked and played harder. As far as I could tell, this was indeed the case. She often called me late at night to invite me to party. On the rare occasion I did join her, we always danced the night away. I did attend her 25th birthday party in the Bulldog, a famous coffeeshop on the Leidseplein, where she had reserved two tables. On the night of the party, Anastasia was surrounded by her colleagues, all of whom were Coptic men from upper-Egypt in their late teens and early twenties without a residency or work permit. At 11 pm, Anastasia served a Nutella cake, which had set her back 80 euros, but was worth every penny, she said. Before cutting it, she poured half a bottle of vodka over it, to give it a bit of kick. She also served two bottles of vodka, which went around from mouth to mouth, and were gone long before the cake. Later, we danced. Around 2:30, I left, together with one of her colleagues, who had a second job as a cleaner, which started at 3am. Anastasia, of course, was still going strong.

Anastasia is only one of many illegalized people in the Netherlands, and although her experiences are probably not representative of this large and diverse group of people, they do begin to showcase the conditions under which illegalized people in the Netherlands live. Indeed, regardless of the differences among them, illegalized people in the Netherlands are not allowed to work, access most healthcare and welfare services, or to rent a room. They cannot open a bank account or a phone subscription, or any other subscription for that matter. As a result, in order to survive, they have to rely on the support and solidarity of people who are willing to risk a fine, either because they see an opportunity in illegalized people, because they take pity, or want to make a statement against the state. This renders illegalized people vulnerable, precisely because the people who may support you are most also the people who may exploit you. Still, even exploitation may alleviate the hardships of illegalization.

In general, illegalized people find support and solidarity through networks that include activists and humanitarians, as well as employers, landlords, and fellow illegalized people. In my experience, illegalized Egyptians mostly accessed such networks through an acquaintance, and as a result, mostly found support and solidarity among Egyptian employers, notably the owners of snackbars and other eateries, and cleaning agencies, as was the case for Anastasia. They also often found housing through their employer, or one of their employer's acquaintances. The

circumstances at work and at home were often deplorable. The illegalized people I met often worked for twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for much less than minimum wage, but, since it was the only work they could find, they had no choice but to accept it. They often shared tiny rooms, for which they paid much more than is legally allowed. There were of course also good employers, and good landlords, who did not exploit illegalized people, and finding them was one of the main challenges for people like Anastasia.

These conditions make life extremely hard, but instead of dwelling on the hardships of illegalization, having just arrived, Anastasia and her friends seemed to relish in the fact that they had made it at all, that they were earning enough to rent a room and eat well, and pay off their debts to family members, or if they no longer had debts, to contribute to their families' incomes. In stark contrast, I also met a few men who arrived in the Netherlands in the 1990s and were still struggling to legalize their stay. These men were in bad shape, and had lost the hope that they would ever legalize their stay, accepting that, for the rest of their lives, they would have to rely on the support of others, especially since they often could not work anymore, because their bodies had given in to the strenuous work conditions of their earlier years in the Netherlands. Indeed, for Anastasia and illegalized people like her, to experience illegalization as something of an adventure may well rest on the conviction that legalization is still within reach, which in the case of Anastasia, indeed seemed to be the case. Still, she, and people like her, were haunted by the specter of deportation, which was an almost constant possibility, and which meant that she would not report instances of sexual abuse, or even cross a red light on her bike, as she and other illegalized people would often point out.

Anastasia relied on the support of fellow humans, which rendered her vulnerable. These practices of support may be interpreted as creating alternative solidarity, and as such, breaking with the idea of solidarity as solely based on nationality. However, in practice, Anastasia and illegalized young people like here were first and foremost supported by other Egyptians (see Chapter Two for an analysis on why national belonging may prevail). Moreover, these Egyptians were also the ones exploiting and abusing her, and young people like her, which may be the other side of the 'help' they offer, but should not be confused with solidarity.

Ultimately, the only way out of illegalization is to leave or to legalize your stay, and to do so, Anastasia and others like her had to present themselves in terms of the legal categories brought about by citizenship regimes. In the process, they enacted Dutch citizenship as an object of desire, and immigrants as desiring something that 'we' have.

1.8 Citizenship at the horizon

In the context of illegalization, maintaining or acquiring a more secure legal status becomes the main objective. In February 2020, two months after arriving in Belgium, Mostafa applied for a residency permit, and in early March, a few weeks before his return flight, he was invited for an interview. Then, COVID-19 reached Belgium, and his application was put on hold and his flight was cancelled. For a few anxious days, Mostafa imagined he would be illegalized too, which, having heard my stories, was a doom scenario for him. To his relief, the Belgium government announced that all temporary visas would be extended another six months, and in August 2020, he was invited for another interview. He prepared well, even if there was not much to prepare, as the interview was only a moment to submit the documents that he already had anyway. A few days later, he received a five year residency permit, and in September 2020, he enrolled in a bachelor in software engineering program. He felt on the move again, but, starting a bachelor's program also made him feel as if his achievements in Egypt were devalued. At the moment, he is trying to finish his degree, and after that, he and his wife want to move to the Netherlands.

A few weeks after I first met him, Saïed was suddenly released. At the time, he insisted that he would leave as soon as he had recovered, but after talking things through with a much better lawyer than he initially had, he understood that he did not have a chance of getting asylum in any other European country than the country he first applied in, and he did not want to go to Trump's America, so instead he decided to re-apply for asylum in the Netherlands. After many months of hard work, his lawyer finally felt that Saïed and his comrades had gathered enough evidence to give the appeal a shot, and then, the waiting began. After six months of waiting, Saïd was invited for an interview by the Immigration and Naturalization Services (IND). He prepared, feverishly, with his lawyer, and with activists who had experience with these kinds of interviews, and then the waiting began again. After another six months, Saïed was informed that the decision was delayed. He thought about appealing, but feared that it would harm his chances. In December 2019, when I was actually at our department's Christmas party, Saïed called me. As I picked up, his voice began to tremble, and it took him at least a minute to tell me that he had received the asylum. Fighting back my tears, I told him how happy I was. He said he was, too. "I am so tired, I can finally rest now", he said. In the weeks that followed, he moved to a social housing studio in a town near Amsterdam, began to study, and got a job. He has also started the process of family reunification, and today, he is living with his wife and four children in a two bedroom social housing apartment. He still wants to sue the Dutch state for what they did to him, but, he is also hopeful that his kids will benefit from growing up in the

Netherlands.

Anastasia travelled to Italy to file her taxes every year. In the summer of 2019, after five years of paying a yearly minimum of €2,000 in taxes in Italy as well as the additional fees her accountant was charging, on top of her own travel expenses, she was finally eligible to apply for Italian citizenship. She did, and, a few days later, received her passport, which she said was unusually quick, something she attributed to her Italian charm. As an Italian citizen she is now allowed to work in the Netherlands, and to invite family members, including her eighteen year old brother. Per EU law, she is supposed to be self-reliant for another five years, meaning that she is not entitled to access welfare benefits or social housing.

1.9 Conclusion: Bordering is ordering

In this chapter, I traced my interlocutors' migration trajectories to examine how borders shape life. I found that the image of the Netherlands and everyday experiences with Dutch state borders effectuated an oscillation between (existential as well as actual) mobility and immobility. The Egyptians I came to know felt stuck, for example in socio-economic precarity (Mostafa), political oppression (Saïed), and gender norms (Anastasia). Reproducing an image of the Netherlands as meritocratic and fair, from Egypt, they imagined the Netherlands as a better launching pad of their futures, which subsequently inserted them into European and Dutch visa regimes.

European and Dutch visa regimes order the world into those for whom international travel is a seamless act and those who can only travel in illegalized ways. Mostafa, Anastasia, Saïed, and most of the other people I met fell, in the latter category, so when they travelled, they usually did so unauthorized or on temporary visas. Still, as they moved across borders, my interlocutors felt on the move again, not quite in the way they wanted, but at least moving. In the Netherlands, they got stuck again, in immigrant detention centers, illegality, and economic precarity.

As a result, until they legalized their stay, the people I worked with had to rely on the solidarity and support of the people they met, which was certainly part of the reason they wanted to work with me. At the same time, this made them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In this context, legal citizenship, or formal inclusion in the Dutch body politic, remained their main goal. However, as I will show in the chapters to come, even after becoming citizens, living as an immigrant in the Netherlands was still marked by an oscillation between hope and fear.

In between hope and fear, the people with whom I worked negotiated identities that defied easy categorization. Mostafa was acutely aware of how legal status shaped the power balance of his marriage, and was determined to establish himself as an adult man before actually starting

a family. In doing so, he conformed to normative ideas of masculinity, but at the same time, by taking the time to become the man he wanted to be, he took pride in resisting the norm of marriage as geared towards starting a family. Anastasia defied gender norms, too, but at the same time, was acutely aware of the risks of doing so, and by choosing safety, she ended up accepting, and thus enacting a world in which women cannot rent a room from men. She also switched between performing Egyptianness, Italianness, and Dutchness, but to do so, she resorted to stereotypical hand gestures and phrases. Yet, in between, it would have been impossible for anyone to pinpoint her national identity. In his attempt to defy being identified as a fortune seeker, or former guest-worker, Saïed held on to and further cultivated his identity as a human rights activist.

Mostafa, Saïed, and Anastasia did not aspire to change the world as we know it. Mostafa moved in order to live a middle-class life, Saïed just wanted the law to work better, and even Anastasia, who was perhaps the least committed to any norms, firmly believed in a kind of freedom that is individual. Indeed, through moving, they sought to become the kind of people they aspired to be, thus confirming modern day icons, in these cases those of the self-made man, a human-rights activists, and an empowered woman. These were not radical aspirations. Still, we may interpret their acts of crossing borders designed to keep them out and of settling in a place made hostile to push them out as acts of harraga, that is, as acts of metaphorically burning borders in order to build a better life, which in and of itself is to refuse the world as it is, or at least to refuse one's place in it. Still, in doing so, they confirmed some of the assumptions that undergird Dutch migration policies, namely that some people will do anything to travel to the Netherlands, and that those people are seeking happiness, as they are popularly accused of in Dutch media.

2

Becoming Egyptian in the Netherlands

Paul was born in Cairo, that much was true, but he had not been to Egypt for nearly twenty years, and after fifty years in the Netherlands, he no longer felt Egyptian, and definitely did not recognize himself in the Egyptians he met through his work as a certified translator in court. They are very different, he said, when I asked him to clarify. He came from a middle-class family, had already had an education before coming to the Netherlands, and had not come just to work, but to be with his wife, my great aunt Hanne. He had worked hard, and had reaped the fruits. They, the Egyptians he would translate for, had not. Well, they had worked hard, but they had not reaped the same fruits. They were not to blame, said Paul. They just did not have the background to benefit from the Netherlands like he had. And so, they had continued to live like they had in Egypt, namely in poor conditions, and unenlightened, *niet verlicht*, he said.

Like Paul, the directors of the Egyptian associations also presented themselves as better educated and therefore better adjusted to life in the Netherlands than the Egyptians they were organizing for. In fact, organizing was not only how they expressed that sense of superiority, but also what could confirm it. However, unlike Paul, they did not self-identify as Dutch.

Quite to the contrary, claiming to choose the best aspects of the two cultures they knew, they praised the Dutch for some of their traits, such as their purported punctuality and efficiency, while reproaching them for their supposed lack of hospitality and family values, reflected most poignantly in parents who actively encourage their children to move out, and adult children who let their parents live in elderly homes without even visiting more than once a week.

In a similar vein, the directors, as well as the people they were organizing for, readily distinguished Egyptians from Moroccan-Dutch and Syrian-Dutch, to whom they simply referred as Moroccans, respectively Syrians. Several people I spoke to evoked Pharaonic history to suggest that Egyptians descend from seven thousands years of civilization, as compared to Moroccan-Dutch who they said had come straight from the mountains. I spoke to people who pointed to the Egyptian snackbars to present Egyptians, and thus themselves, as particularly entrepreneurial, as opposed to Moroccan "guest-workers", and Syrian "refugees", both of whom were supported by the government, and did not have to establish themselves through hard work like Egyptians had, as one of my interlocutors put it.

In this chapter, I eschew the question of how "Dutch", "Egyptian", "Moroccan" and "Syrian" compare to one another. Given the way the world currently works, asking this or a similar question may be intuitive, or, at the very least, it provides an imperative for answering the question in a way that makes yourself and the people with whom you are grouped together look good. However, as I will show with regard to comparative research featuring Egyptian in the Netherlands, to ask the comparative question is to take for granted the idea of nationality, and to answer it is to homogenize and particularize an otherwise diverse group of people.

Seeing how readily the people I worked with evoked nationality based figures, I instead trace how these figures came about and conditioned the lives of the people I worked with. Following Michael Keith (2005), who suggests that iconic figures come about through an ongoing and unpredictable back-and-forth between categorization and self-identification, I begin by showing how the back and forth between Dutch efforts to categorize immigrants and Egyptian efforts to self-identify brought about the locally iconic spaces of the Egyptian snack bar and Egyptian association, as well as the corresponding figures of the Egyptian entrepreneur and association directors. I then draw on fieldwork conducted at the associations and snack bars to describe how the figurations of these spaces and the people that inhabit them shape everyday politics, to point out that the back-and-forth between categorization and self-identification is ongoing, and continues to shape social life. I then situate Egyptian figures within the larger cast of 'good' and 'bad' or 'deserving' and 'undeserving' immigrants, as well as the more general configuration of immigrants as what Ghassan Hage (2005) has called "third-world looking people", that is, people who

perform manual labor and are racialized as non-white. Finally, I describe how (self-)identified Egyptians drew on these configurations to situate themselves vis-à-vis themselves, each other, and the world in which they lived. In the conclusion, I draw on all this to argue that nationality worked both to connect and disconnect Egyptians from themselves, other immigrants, and the Dutch.

2.1 Towards minorities policies and research

Historically, across nation-states, both state authorities and researchers have invested in distinguishing between different kinds of immigrants. As a result, the history of immigrant categorization is the history of immigration policies and research. The Netherlands is no exception.

The history of Dutch immigration research has itself been the subject of much research, increasingly so from the 1970s onwards. These studies bring to light the long-term underlying principles of the way in which immigrants have been categorized, as well as the significance of changing the ways in which we categorize. In order to tease out those continuities and changes, in this chapter, I read the history of Dutch immigration policies and research as reconfiguring the relationship between residency, nationality, and citizenship. I start with the constitutions of 1814 and 1815, in which the Dutch, *Nederlanders*, were legally defined for the first time.

The 1814 constitution defines the Dutch (*Nederlanders*) as residents (*ingezetenen*) of the nine Dutch provinces of that time. Reading early drafts of the 1814 and 1815 constitutions, Eric Heijs (1993: 16) notes that the term Dutch (*Nederlanders*) only made it into the text in the very last stages. Apparently, initial drafts only mentioned residents, while later drafts mentioned 'nativity' (*inboorlingenschap*), which was meant to be a stricter definition of whom the constitution would apply to. According to Jan Mannoury (1954: 37-38), King Willem I personally insisted on replacing nativity with Dutch in order to maintain the authority to naturalize 'aliens' (*vreemdelingen*), but according to Willem Frederik Prins (1980: 6-7), it was actually Cornelis Elout, one of the members of the constitutional committee, who insisted on the term Dutch, because it was ambiguous on that question of naturalization. Either way, one year later, the constitution of 1815 more or less settled the question of whether naturalized people could be considered Dutch by explaining that the phrase 'people who are born as Dutch' included all those who were born on Dutch soil, including the colonies, as well as all people who were Dutch by virtue of legal interpretation (*wetsduiding*), such as children of Dutch parents born on foreign soil, and those who were naturalized as Dutch, which was a right reserved to the monarch. The 1938 National Civil Code, which replaced the French Code Civil that had hitherto been

in place, codified this in law, so that residency, citizenship, and nationality largely overlapped.

This began to change with the Nationality Law of 1850, which defined who was Dutch in relation to the exercise of political rights (*staatskundige rechten*) such as the right to vote and hold public office, and explicitly excluded natives of the colonies. Curiously, this Nationality Law did not replace, but rather came to exist next to the National Civil Code, which had defined who was Dutch in relation to basic civil rights such as equality under the law. This resulted in what was referred to at the time as double Dutch citizenship, or the situation in which legal citizenship and political citizenship were separated from one another. This situation lasted until the new Nationality Act of 1892.

The Nationality Act of 1892 did away with the combination of citizenship by right of blood (*jus sanguinis*) and citizenship by right of soil (*jus soli*), as well as the separation of civil rights and political rights, in favor of one citizenship acquired through the father's blood. From then on, only the legally recognized children of Dutch men were automatically Dutch, while people categorized as 'native' to the colonies were formally excluded from citizenship. Naturalization was still possible, but applicants would have to prove their affinity with the Netherlands, and each application would have to be approved by parliament. In other words, the 1882 nationality act separated residency from nationality and citizenship, but maintained and deepened the overlap between the latter two, in the sense that Dutchness was now akin not only to having the right to equality before the law, but also political rights.

In the period after the Second World War, the Dutch government insisted that the Netherlands was a country of emigration, not of immigration. The country was full, they said. That said, before, during, and after Indonesian independence, Dutch governments facilitated the repatriation of so-categorized 'Europeans' or 'Totoks', 'Indo-Europeans', and various 'native people' who had fought alongside the Royal Dutch East Indies Army and were therefore persecuted. Furthermore, in the 1950s and 1960s, Dutch governments facilitated the recruitment of so-categorized 'guest-workers' from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Morocco and Turkey. In addition, foreign nationals travelled to and settled in the Netherlands autonomously, as Paul did.

Per the official discourse, the Dutch government was not going to develop a comprehensive policy aimed at incorporating these people (Entzinger, 1975). Instead, national and local governments developed incorporation policies on the go. They did so on the basic principles of the 1882 nationality act, which restricted Dutch citizenship to Dutch nationals, and stipulated that, in order to become a Dutch citizen/national, one would have to provide evidence of a long-standing and profound relationship to the country (Heijs, 1993). Together, this categorically

excluded indigenous populations of the Dutch colonies from Dutch citizenship, and made it extremely hard if not impossible for them to become citizens should they have travelled to the Netherlands.

According to these principles, European or Totok repatriates were recategorized as Dutch, and told to silently settle back in through their families and social-political pillars. Indo-European repatriates were recategorized as Indische Nederlanders (Indo-Dutch) or Indisch (Indo) for short. They were supposed to take root and refrain from any indigenous habits they may have been susceptible to. In order to facilitate or ensure that they would, local bureaucrats arranged housing, while social workers helped them to become employable and taught them Dutch ways of 'living' (van Amersfoort and van Niekerk, 2006).

Initially, the various 'native' people who had fought alongside the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (*KNIL*) were referred to as Ambonese, or sometimes Moluccans. The Ambonese/Moluccans were meant to stay in the Netherlands for six months. They were housed in so-called *woonoorden*, residential areas intended to be temporary, which in practice were camps in former military barracks, monasteries, and Nazi concentration camps, among other remote places (Steijlen, 2015). These camps themselves offered some opportunities to work, as a cook or cleaner for example. In the larger camps, there were schools for the younger children. In the smaller camps, children were sent to nearby Dutch schools. Other than that, the Ambonese were supposed to just wait, without taking root. The guest-workers were meant to return, too, as soon as they would stop working. To prevent them from taking root, the Dutch government recommended a four year rotating system.

Finally, individual people like Paul, were categorized as *vreemdelingen*, aliens. Aliens were supposed to obtain a residency permit, and could do so by registering at the local administration. After holding a residency permit for five years, aliens could apply for naturalization, but in order to be granted nationality, they would have to prove their longstanding and profound connection to the Netherlands, renounce their previous nationality, pay 100 guilders, and be accepted by parliament (Heijs, 1993). This made it practically impossible for most aliens to ever become eligible, if only because, at the time, most states did not allow citizens to renounce their nationality. This included Egypt, and so, at that time, Paul did not yet become a citizen.

In summary, in the after-war period, governments insisted that the Netherlands was not and would not become a country of immigration, but intuitively drew on nationality to distinguish between people who were Dutch or at least half-Dutch and thus citizens, people who were not and could not become Dutch, and thus temporary guests, and individuals who had specific reasons to stay in the Netherlands, but did not require any special attention (Entzinger, 1975).

The Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics did not yet collect data on non-national residents, nor did the government commission many reports on the situation of any of the groups of people who were settling in the Netherlands at the time. In 1959, as a notable exception to that rule, the Scientific Council for Government Advice (WRR) commissioned Hilda Verwey-Jonker to report on the situation of the Ambonese, who had been in the Netherlands for a few years by then, and who required more adequate housing. In the report, Verwey-Jonker and her team confirmed that the camps were no longer suitable, if they had ever been, and recommended the government to relocate the Ambonese to designated neighborhoods.

Following the example set by the government, Dutch academics at the time prioritized the study of Dutch emigration over the study of immigration. However, the notable exceptions, such as Menno Vellinga and Willem Wolters' (1966) study on Chinese immigrants in Amsterdam, Jacques Ex's (1966) study on how Indo-European refugees adjusted to life in the Netherlands, and Rob Wentholt's (1967) study on guest-workers, were a sign of what was to come, namely an excessive research focus on those non-nationals who were considered different from the Dutch, rather than on those who were largest in numbers, such as Germans, Belgians, or British aliens (*vreemdelingen*).

In 1964, the Dutch government introduced an updated version of the Nationality Act, according to which women who were married to foreigners could opt to keep their citizenship. As it happened, this was also the year my great aunt Hanne married Paul, and so Hanne had the option to stay Dutch, and she decided to do so. Paul himself was able to obtain a residency permit by registering at the local municipality. Formally, Paul had no obligation to pass integration tests, as he would have today. However, given the conflation of citizenship and nationality, he still had to negotiate a context in which the options were to try and pass as Dutch or at least Dutch enough, or to remain a temporary guest forever. Paul chose the former, and was in a position to do so, unlike the Ambonese or the guest-workers, who would not pass as Dutch, even if they tried as hard as Paul did. Of course, Paul did not always pass either, but my impression was that he often did, and his children and grandchildren most certainly do.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, while Paul was busy establishing himself as Dutch, people across the world were losing their jobs due to restructuring of global capitalism. In the Netherlands, these so-called 'crises' made it clear that not all guest-workers would leave after their job, and that some Dutch citizens in the colonies of Surinam and the Dutch Caribbean were ready to try their luck in the Netherlands. In the meantime, the children of the repatriates began to speak up about the horrors of the Japanese camps and the added trauma of being silenced in the Netherlands, while the children of Moluccans increasingly began to demand rights in the

Netherlands, most dramatically through the hijacking of a train that led to the death of two hostages and six hijackers in 1979.

In response, politicians began to suggest that the Netherlands was becoming or had already become a country of immigration, while academics such as Han Entzinger (1975) were shedding light on what were then called "ethnic" or "allochthonous minorities", or minorities from foreign soils (van Amersfoort and Penninx, 1994; for a bibliography of the time, see Bovenkerk, 1975). Alarmed, in 1979 the Dutch Scientific Council for Government (WRR) hired anthropologist Rinus Penninx to sketch the outlines of a future minorities policy. In his report[1], Penninx described the three main minority groups, Mediterranean guest-workers, Moluccans, and Surinamese and Antillean citizens, before recommending that government deal with this new form of diversity in the same way that it had long dealt with religious and political diversity, namely by facilitating cultural expression as well as political representation in order to prevent the twin evils of deprivation and segregation. According to Justus Uitermark (2013: 70), Penninx's report not only reads like, but in a very real sense is, the founding document of the minorities policy, which eventually came into force in 1982, as well as the 1985 nationality act, which effectively disconnected nationality and citizenship, and brought residency and citizenship much closer to each other, by expanding the rights of residents, and by providing a more feasible pathway towards citizenship. As soon as the option became available, Paul applied for Dutch citizenship, for himself, and his sons.

As soon as the minorities policy came into effect, self-run but government-funded associations mushroomed. In 1983, in an apparent attempt to combat this fragmentation, the municipality of Amsterdam set up six immigrant advisory councils. Justus Uitermark points out that these councils were rife with contradictions from the start. First off, each council was supposed to represent at least 16,000 people. This requirement forced together 'Moroccans' (including royalists and communists), 'Turks' (including among others, Grey Wolves and Kurds), 'Ghanaians and Surinamese', 'Southern Europeans', and perhaps most awkward of all, 'Chinese and refugees'. At best, these people had no shared interest, but much worse than that, they were often each other's political opponents. Moreover, in order to be effective, the leaders of these councils had to be well versed in governmental logic, and credibly represent a marginalized constituency, which proved to be conflicting requirements that undermined their ability to do the work they were meant to do.

The Dutch government also followed Pennix' recommendation to foster research on minorities for the purpose of future policy. Accordingly, in 1982, the Dutch Central Bureau for

[1] https://www.wrr.nl/publicaties/rapporten/1979/05/09/etnische-minderheden

Statistics (CBS) began to register residents' and citizens' countries of birth, allowing researchers to structurally compare minorities to each other and the majority for the first time. Having conducted such research himself, Jan Rath (1991) observes how the practice of grouping together people on the basis of their country of birth in order to tease out the differences between them not only accentuates those differences, but actively contributes to what he calls minoritization, or the process by which minorities are produced and reproduced as different from and lesser than the majority. In my reading, such comparative studies also help to produce iconic figures through which we talk about postcolonial difference and inequality, and they do so by producing the particularities that make them different from us, that is, by homogenizing and particularizing them.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education increasingly funded what became known as minorities research. This further strengthened the already strong relations between policy and academic research, of which Rinus Penninx's own policy agenda setting research was a prime example. For Frank Bovenkerk, one of the main minorities researchers of the time, "the degree of intimacy between policy-makers, politics and science, and the ease by which government officials and university researchers would trade places was astonishing" (in Essed and Nimako [2006], their translation). According to Jan Rath (2001: 2) this intimacy resulted in a research that was "superficial in theory" and suffering from "one-sidedness", to the point that researchers more or less study the same thing over and over, and failed to consider other aspects and processes. And Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako (2006) reveal minorities research as an ideological project built on an insider-outsider paradigm that problematizes 'them' by downplaying or outright ignoring the ramifications of colonialism and discrediting race critical paradigms.

These critiques are part and parcel of a larger body of work critiquing migration and immigration studies for assuming nationality as the primary source of belonging (Glick-Schiller, Caglar and Gulbrandsen, 2006), and more generally, for naturalizing the nation-state form, sanitizing nationalism, and problematizing some forms of moving and settling (e.g. Wimmer and Glick-Schiller, 2002, 2003). These critiques have made for well-established alternative traditions, such as critical border studies, and immigrant centered perspectives, which in general, start from individual migrants, the networks they form, and the institutions that emerge as a result. Still, as a result of available funding and data, and of the world in which we live, comparative research remains the dominant paradigm, in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Indeed, in the past decades more conventional researchers and investigative journalists continue to use CBS data to compare different groups of immigrants to the Dutch majority on the basis of nationality, for example in terms of labor market participation (Wolff and Penninx,

1993), welfare use (Koopmans, 2010), crime rates (Unnever, 2019), family formation (De Valk et al., 2004), parenting practices (Pels and Nijsten, 2017) and cultural views (Dagevos, 2001). Reading this literature, Willem Schinkel (2020) insists Dutch integration research uncritically adopts the epistemic perspective of society as an already existing whole into which immigrants can integrate into varying degrees, so that "diversity" is seen to imperil society, rather than constitute social life. I agree, but reading studies that mention Egyptians while being in conversation with Egyptians, I also found that, at least for some Egyptians, these studies, and the iconic figures they bring about were, also something to hold on to, in the sense that it offered them a way of making sense of the differences and inequalities they experience every day.

2.2 Egyptians enter the scene

In preparation for fieldwork, I searched for existing information and research on Egyptians in the Netherlands. I did not find much, but sources that I did find told a consistent story. This is not so surprising, and has to do more with methodology, than with the everyday reality. Researchers, including myself, either use CBS data, or reach out to community leaders, and, as result, find the same things. Indeed, when I began fieldwork, the directors of the different associations readily served me the story that I had pieced together, without me even asking for it. And when I went back to have a closer look at some of those sources, I realized that my interlocutors had either provided the input for them or were commenting on them. In this section, I repeat the story they told me, referencing both the secondary sources that I used and the conversations I had. I do not do so because I believe that this story offers an especially nuanced version of the history of Egyptians in the Netherlands. Rather, I do so because it shows the iconization of spaces such as the Egyptian snack bar and associations, as well as the derivative figures of the Egyptian entrepreneur and community leader.

In January 2017, the directors of the different Egyptian association individually told me that there are about thirty to forty thousand Egyptians in the Netherlands. At the time, the CBS reported 13.591 first and 10.365 second generation Egyptians, on a total population of 17[2] million residents in the Netherlands. These numbers notably exclude illegalized Egyptians like Anastasia and Saïed who figured in Chapter One, as well as children born in the Netherlands to Egyptian born fathers and non-Egyptian foreign mothers, who are registered according to their mother's country of birth. I have not been able to find reliable data on illegalized Egyptians or Dutch citizens born to Egyptian born fathers and non-Egyptian foreign born mothers.

[2] Data available on: https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/37325/table

However, according to the Egyptian demographer Ayman Zohry (2007), in 2000, Egypt's Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) estimated that there were about 40.000 Egyptians in the Netherlands, as opposed to the 14.398 Egyptians registered by the CBS at the time, which gives a sense of the gap between the CBS data and the more informal reality. CAPMAS nowadays follows the official numbers provided by European countries, probably because at this moment of migration treaties, low numbers are politically more convenient. However, given the political and socio-economic developments in Egypt, and the intensification of Dutch borders, it seems unlikely that this gap has decreased. Moreover, I actually met quite a lot of Egyptian born men who had children with Moroccan born women, who would be categorized as from a Moroccan background by the CBS, but who might themselves identify as 'Moroccan-Egyptian Dutch'.

According to the people whom I talked to in 2017, and who I found out provided the input for earlier studies on Egyptian settling, Egyptian migration in the Netherlands began with young Coptic men who were travelling to the Netherlands to work in Israeli-owned shawarma snack bars. These Coptic students usually traveled on tourist visas, but in the Netherlands presented themselves as refugees. Today, this would mean that they would not be allowed to work, but back then, residency status and the right to work were not yet linked, so they could actually be legally employed. This was something I did not know yet, but which I found out after asking how people back then found work, which was a question that puzzled my interlocutors, as for them, it was obvious that residency had only been recently linked to the right to work, whereas I had never thought of them as separate things.

In 1985, Coptic clergy from New Jersey founded a Coptic church in Amsterdam Noord. In addition to offering religious services, the church provides social, legal, and financial support, Dutch classes for adults, and Arabic classes for children, much like Coptic churches do in Egypt, and much like Egyptian associations run by Egyptian Muslims would do from the mid-1990s onwards (de Wit, 2002). Meanwhile, in these early days of Egyptian immigration, Egyptian Muslims, who were also coming to the Netherlands, were joining mosques and other Islamic institutions run by Moroccan-Dutch.

Initially, by virtue of their visas, these Egyptian 'tourists' were seen as temporary seasonal workers (*seizoensarbeiders*), and accordingly described as such by Choenni (1993, 1997) and people drawing on his work, such as Jan Rath (2002) and Masja van Meeteren and colleagues (2013). In practice, Egyptian seasonal workers stayed, much like the Moroccan and Turkish guest-workers who stayed after losing their jobs. After legalizing their stay, many Egyptians set up their own businesses, which then became a pathway of incorporation for later generations

of Egyptian immigrants. Apparently, many of these later generation Egyptians immigrants followed the example of their elders, because according to Choenni (1993, 1997), by 1993, Egyptians owned an approximated 25% of all snack bars in Amsterdam and 75% of all shawarma bars. This is a number that I cannot verify, but it has since circulated in peer-reviewed publications (Rath, 2002; van Meeteren et al, 2013; Sportel, 2016) and a government report in which they were labeled as particularly "entrepreneurial" (Fijnaut and Bovenkerk, 1996).

The Egyptian men I met in 2017 drew on this image of Egyptian entrepreneurialism to present themselves as businessmen. They showed me pictures of their supermarkets, computer shops, cleaning agencies, construction companies, halal meat trading companies, and law and accountancy firms, among others. Like Masja van Meeteren and her colleagues (2013), I later found out that most of these businesses had never really gotten off the ground, and that these men had instead worked for the few Egyptians who were in the position to employ others. And they did so until they were forced to retire due to work related injuries and illness such as chronic pain and lung-diseases, after which they came to rely on unemployment and/or disability benefits.

In 1995, the coupling of residency status and the right to work and access social services increased the stakes of legalizing your stay. According to Puck de Wit (2002), who conducted fieldwork with Egyptian Copts in Amsterdam, in the wake of this coupling law, Copts began to present themselves as refugees. The Copts that I met in 2017 maintained a narrative about Egypt being unsafe for them, pointing to the attacks on churches and abductions to make their case. Meanwhile, the men, both Copts and Muslims, accused each other of conducting so-called business marriages, which they did not necessarily see as morally wrong, but which they knew were considered sham marriages by the Dutch authorities, and, in fact, could cost them their passport if they were to be found out (see also Sportel, 2016). Drawing on CBS data, Helga de Valk and colleagues (2004) found that among immigrants, Egyptian men were relatively likely to marry women born in the Netherlands, and that a relatively high number of these marriages were dissolved after three years, the moment that dependent spouses become eligible for an independent residency status. And although they state that they cannot verify whether these were 'marriages of convenience', by posing the questions whether they are or not, they at least suggest that they might have been.

In the meantime, more and more (divorced) Egyptian men married Egyptian women and, subsequently, applied for family reunification. According to the CBS data, in 1999, Egyptian women were the most fertile women in the Netherlands, with 4.9 children per woman, compared to 1.6 for "autochthonous" women (de Valk et al, 2004: 25). According to my interlocu-

tors, the arrival of women and children prompted Egyptian Muslims to use available funding to set up Egyptian associations as spaces in which Egyptians could come together to maintain and transmit Egyptian culture and language and provide for and support one another. Around the same time, Egyptian Muslims set up a mosque in Amsterdam to provide religious services that were more aligned to Egyptian understandings of Islam than the services provided in Moroccan-Dutch Islamic spaces. This mosque never became distinctively Egyptian, in part because not all Egyptian Muslims were attracted to it, and in part because it also attracted many non-Egyptians.

Curiously, none of the reports that I found discuss Egyptian associations extensively, even though the researchers who put together these reports heavily relied on the people directing these associations (but see Hendriks [2008] on the Middle Eastern diaspora for an overview of the Egyptian associations at that time). I assume this is the case because in the Dutch context, such immigrant associations are so ubiquitous that they are taken for granted, or because they are considered mere reminiscences of the past.

2.3 Towards integration policies and research

In the 1980s, comparative research revealed that minorities were lagging behind the majority on almost every measure, and especially on the labor market and education system, fueling public concern, and eventually prompting the Dutch government to order a new WRR report (1987). In that report (1989)[3], the WRR team stressed the need to shift focus from cultural expression and political representation to labor market participation and adult education, and to target not only recognized minorities, but all people from foreign soils, including not just foreign-born residents and citizens, but all residents and citizens descending from foreign born parents or grandparents. Accordingly, the CBS began to register residents' and citizens' parents' and grandparents' countries of birth.

In the early 1990s, right-wing politician Frits Bolkestein (VVD) successfully spearheaded further debates about culture, starting with an op-ed piece titled "The Minorities Policy Should Be Handled with Guts"[4], which became the main reference point for years to come. In it, Bolkestein drew upon the 1989 WRR report to argue that the Netherlands had to defend itself against the inferior culture of Islam, and that integration was failing because "multiculturalism" in general and welfare workers in particular were too accommodating. Initially, Bolkestein's cul-

[3] https://www.wrr.nl/publicaties/rapporten/1989/05/09/allochtonenbeleid

[4] Bolkestein, F. (1991a) Integratie van minderheden moet met lef worden aangepakt. De Volkskrant, 12 september.

turalist view on Islam was met with some serious opposition by politicians on the mainstream left, many of whom maintained a cultural relativist stance. However, while some more marginal actors continued to call out Bolkestein for his xenophobia, the more prominent members of the labor party felt compelled to go on record to say that Bolkestein was pointing to some very real problems that plagued multicultural neighborhoods, with the very notable exception of labor minister Hedy d'Ancona (Uitermark, 2013).

In 1994, the coalition of labor (PvdA), Frits Bolkestein's conservative liberals (VVD) and progressive liberals (D66) agreed to bracket ideology in favor of a supposedly technocratic managerialism. In practice, they developed a new immigrant integration act, which was to focus on immigrant integration, at the time defined as participation on the labor market. According to the labor party, this would empower the allochthonous, while the liberal party said that integration would make them contribute to the Dutch economy and reduce welfare expenditures.

In these years, the minority advisory councils, which had only been set up a few years prior, began to lose their central position. According to Justus Uitermark (2013), there were three reasons for this. First, progressives had pushed left-leaning immigrants in leading positions in the councils, who were increasingly unable to reach common ground with the more conservative leaders who emerged through religious institutions. Second, as part of a wave of privatization and a more 'business-like' style of governing, from the 1990s onwards, Dutch governments cut back on large-scale structural subsidies in favor of smaller, problem-oriented funding. This initially led to more but smaller immigrant associations, and later, when funding was further decreased, to fewer and smaller (immigrant) associations competing on the market place of funding directly related to the problems immigrants supposedly face or cause. Third, and finally, from the 1990s onwards, second generation youth began to see the older generation as coopted and instead developed a culture of defiance (cf. De Jong, 2007).

In 1998, parliament accepted the Civic Integration Act (*Wet Integratie Nieuwkomers*), infamously inaugurating the world's first civic integration policies. On paper, this act obligated new long-term residents to follow a twelve-month integration course, consisting of six hundred hours of Dutch language instruction, civic education, and preparation for the labor market, there were no measures to enforce the obligation, and newcomers from the EU and the main OECD countries were exempted from this obligation through bilateral treaties.

In 2000, prominent labor politician Paul Scheffer revitalized Frits Bolkestein's culturalism with an influential op-ed piece called "The Multicultural Drama"[5]. Scheffer had long positioned himself as a common man, and in the piece, he blamed the political left of being elitists

[5] Scheffer, P. (2000). Het multiculturele drama. NRC Handelsblad, 29 januari.

by refusing to acknowledge how culture, and Islam in particular, were incompatible with emancipation. According to Justus Uitermark (2013), this language of emancipation made culturalism acceptable among the left, and in the year or so that followed, integration as empancipation was widely debated among mainstream-left politicians and intellectuals. As Justus Uitermark observes, these debates notably excluded immigrants themselves.

Then, 9/11 happened, providing a fertile ground for Samuel Huntington's (1993) clash-of-civilization discourse to take hold around the world. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn, who had been fear mongering about the Islamization of the Netherlands, quickly rose to prominence, with popular media featuring him night after night to lament the political establishment for refusing to acknowledge that Islam was a backward culture and a threat to the Dutch way of living. In 2002, he was set for a major electoral victory, but nine days before the elections he was shot dead by a left-wing animal rights activist.

In the years after, myriad politicians capitalized on Pim Fortuyn's legacy, by similarly positioning themselves as political renegades who were impugned if not persecuted for speaking the truth about Islam. In response, the national government also instructed local governments to defund cultural associations in favor of neighborhood centers and activities aimed at bringing together neighbors across cultural differences and so-called "target group policies" (*doelgroepenbeleid*), or policies that targeted group specific problems (van Nispen and Scholten, 2014).

Meanwhile, the national government drafted a new Civic Integration Act, which was passed by parliament in 2006 (Joppke, 2007). The new civic integration act expanded the scope of integration to encompass not only language and civic education, but also Dutch history and education. So-categorized "non-Western" residents were required to pass an integration test in order to become Dutch citizens, while 'non-Western' partners had to pass a preliminary language and culture test in their country of origin in order to acquire a spousal visa (Ibid.). This category of "non-Western" refers to people holding citizenship in all African, Latin American, and Asian countries, with the notable exceptions of Indonesia, Surinam, and Japan. These exceptions are odd, but they are not random, for Indonesian and Surinamese immigrants are considered Western because they are seen as already adjusted to the Dutch ways, thanks to the colonial past, while Japanese immigrants are only considered Western because most of them work for multinational corporations. So, indeed, as Dvora Yanow and Marleen van Haar (2013) point out, these exemptions merely reveal the categories of non-Western and Western for what they are, namely, categories of presumed proximity, and difference.

This shift from a comprehensive minorities policy to a combination of integration, neighborhood based, and target group policies has been described as the moralization (van Houdt and

Schinkel, 2010) and culturalization of citizenship (Duyvendak et al., 2016), or an increasing emphasis on the moral and cultural aspects of citizenship rather than the legal ones. In the terms set out in this chapter, this shift effectuated a further decoupling of citizenship and nationality, as one can now be a Dutch citizen without being considered a Dutch national. Meanwhile, the gap between residency and citizenship was widened, as the legal rights of residents have been restricted and it has grown harder to become a citizen.

In the 2010s, the WRR took it upon itself to search for terms and classifications that would do justice to reality, that were refined enough for policy advice, and were non-exclusionary. This culminated in a report in 2016[6]. In the report, the WRR research team started by stating that the labels "allochthonous" and "autochthonous", and "Western" and "non-Western" were out of date, because they no longer encompassed the diversity of migrations and immigrations, and because they had become charged terms. The team then states that classifying people according to their country of origin is only justifiable if (1) it serves a legitimate goal, (2) helps to realize that goal, (3) if that goal cannot be realized otherwise, (4) if the benefits of classifying outweigh the downsides. In subsequent chapters, the team discusses alternative classification and terms, as well as the goals that classification could serve, how classification could help to reach those goals, and the benefits and downsides to classification. In the conclusion, they argue to drop the categories "allochthonous" and "autochthonous", and "Western" and "non-Western" in favor of the labels "people with migration backgrounds" and people with Dutch backgrounds". These labels would still include first generation and second-generation immigrants, and still allow for more precise clustering according to a warranted purpose.

At first glance, the WRR report seems like a conscientious reconsideration of the use of classifications, but beneath the surface, it reproduces the insider-outsider paradigm in which "they" face and cause specific problems that should be targeted as such. This is most obvious in the final pages, in which the WRR team offers three cases to explain when classification and clustering are warranted. First, the lagging behind of second-generation migrants would warrant the distinction between people with migration backgrounds and people with Dutch backgrounds and a further clustering according to language spoken at home. Second, the overrepresentation of youth from certain cultural backgrounds among young delinquents would warrant clustering according to culture. Third, the over-occurrence of some disease among people of certain ethnic backgrounds would warrant clustering according to ethnicity. Here, in these three examples, the focus is on "them", the problems "they" are facing and represent, again leaving

[6]https://www.wrr.nl/publicaties/verkenningen/2016/11/01/migratie-en-classificatie-naar-een-meervoudig-migratie-idioom-34

unaccounted "us", and the harm "we" inflict.

It was in response to these developments that Egyptians developed Egyptian institutions like Egyptian associations and Egyptian snack bars. In the following sections, I explore these spaces in order to tease out how the combination of a taboo on organizing on the basis of nationality and stigmatizing target group policies shaped these institutions, and brought about those iconic spaces and figures.

2.4 The associations formerly known as Egyptian

As described in the introduction, over the course of my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time at Egyptian associations, and in doing so, I followed in the footsteps of researchers who came before me. Yet, while these studies mention the associations and even their directors by name, none of them take the associations seriously for what they were, namely, sites in which Egyptians negotiated what it meant to be Egyptian in the Netherlands, and perhaps more importantly, as sites that offer privileged insight into how contemporary target group policies interact with the basic premise that people belong to nations to mediate social relations.

The Egyptians whom I met at the different associations were primarily interested in coming together to eat food, exchange gossip, discuss politics, talk about the challenges of everyday life in the Netherlands, and provide practical, legal, and financial support to one another. However, at the time of my fieldwork, there was no categorical funding for immigrant associations anymore, as such associations were no longer seen as preventing deprivation and segregation, but rather as producing it. Instead, there was funding for activities that would address the problems to do with immigrants, notably the lack of neighborhood cohesion and livability, women's disempowerment, gender inequality, obesity, and Islamic radicalization. These were not necessarily the kind of issues that Egyptians were concerned about, but they did offer an opportunity for funding.

In this playing field, the directors had four basic options: they could self- or crowd-fund the activities that Egyptians wanted; they could apply for funding for migrant specific activities; they could apply for funding for neighborhood activities and use the money to bring together Egyptians; and/or they could apply for such funding and actually organize the activities. In practice, these options all led to frictions that could easily be interpreted as policy failure.

At one end of the spectrum, Gamal and Bahaa claimed to run Etihad without direct government funding, which according to Bahaa, kept it *zuiver*, pure, as he put it in Dutch. In order to finance their weekly get-together, they asked for a monthly contribution of ten euros. How-

ever, most of the people 'forgot' or outright refused to pay, so in practice, Gamal and Bahaa were forced to keep their expenses low or pay out of their own pocket. In most circumstances, this would have prevented them from getting together. However, when Gamal and Bahaa had just started, Gamal had used his connections to get access to one of the neighborhood centers in Amsterdam East for one year. Since then, each year, the coordinator of the neighborhood centers in Amsterdam East had wanted to end the arrangement but each time, Gamal had managed to keep access to one or another community center. In 2017, Gamal asked me to call the municipal coordinator on his behalf, and although she did end up making space for Etihad again, she also said that she was already getting into trouble for providing much sought-after space to a bunch of Egyptian men to sit around. "We don't do that anymore", she said.

A few weeks later, after another dinner paid out of their own pockets, Gamal and Bahaa announced they were applying for funding for a neighborhood restaurant, like their friend Ali had done through his association. You only show up for food anyway, Gamal said, addressing no one in particular. Idris, who was one of the people who indeed only showed up for food, responded immediately. He attended the meetings to be among Egyptians, not to serve lonely elderly like they are doing, he said, dismissively nodding to Ali. Ali looked at Idris indignantly, but others nodded, and one man drummed on the table. Apparently feeling emboldened, Idris stood up, took a pile of fifty euro notes out of his pocket and threw them on the table. I'll pay for a dinner for us, he said, with an emphasis on us. And with that, Gamal's proposal was off the table. Afterwards, Ali and I left Etihad together. As we biked away, he explained that this was exactly why he no longer organized for Egyptians. They are an ungrateful bunch of dogs, he said. Although collaborating with both, Ali, then, was on the other side of the spectrum of Gamal and Bahaa, and he actually referred to his association as 'formerly Egyptian'.

In between Gamal and Bahaa and Ali were Malika and Karima. Malika ran a 'multicultural' association, and used every opportunity she had to express her commitment to bringing together people across cultural backgrounds. In practice, she struggled to attract non-Egyptians and especially white Dutch people. In March 2017, Malika invited me for a multicultural dinner in the neighborhood center in Amsterdam Noord that she was co-organizing with a thirty-something year old white woman living in the neighborhood. I had a lovely evening, talking with Egyptians about Egyptian food and how to best prepare it. Then, during dessert, a man came in, and suddenly, a verbal fight erupted between him and a woman whom I did not know. After about five minutes, Malika managed to get the man to leave, but in his wake, Malika's co-organizer ordered her over to announce that she was going to leave as well. It was not so much the fight, she said, although it had not helped, but rather the whole evening. Your people do

not want to talk to us, she said. Malika pleaded with her to stay, but she said she really did not see the point of having a conversation about the future of the neighborhood after all, and that she would come in on Monday to tell the neighborhood center's manager that she would retire from the project.

In the fall of 2017, the manager of the neighborhood center where Karima organized her activities decided that, in order to improve the center's services, the organizers had to join each other's activities. At the time, Karima was in the middle of running a de-radicalization workshop for parents of at-risk youth, for which seven Egyptian mothers had registered. One Monday morning, a tall white woman in her forties joined. As was usual, the session started with a sheikha reciting a piece of Quran supposedly pertaining to the matter at hand for the day. As soon as the sheikha began to recite, I saw the woman glance at me, and after another minute, she gently touched me by the shoulder, leaned over, and asked me if I could help her follow. After I told her I also struggled to follow formal Arabic and could not provide an accurate translation, she decided to interrupt the sheikha. She cleared her throat, and addressing no-one in particular, began to say that in order to learn about the work that Karima was doing, she would have to be able to follow. Karima, who was not easily flustered, looked at me, but I did not know what to say either. After a few seconds of silence, Karima hesitantly began to explain that, in order for this workshop to be effective, it would have to be in Arabic because the women who were attending did not speak Dutch very well, and definitely would not be able to discuss the intricate matters at hand. The woman did not budge. Maybe someone could translate, she suggested. Her usual self again, Karima dismissed the suggestion, saying that this would disrupt the flow, and that the aims of the workshop were more important than the cross-sectional evaluation and inspiration. Upset, the woman got up, told Karima she should not underestimate the importance of learning from each other, and left. I never saw again, or any other non-Arabic speaking person at the workshop.

In this world of nation-states, people who find themselves on foreign lands are likely to seek out their fellow nationals, and at one point or another, even if they do not want to. Egyptians are no exception. The Egyptians I met sought each other out for many different reasons. They wanted to reminiscence about the country in which they grew up, and to which some of them could never return. They wanted to come together to reflect on experiences in the country they settled in. They wanted to come together to exchange information specific to being Egyptian, for example on how to prove that Egypt is not safe for political activists, how to register to vote in Egypt, or how to make a Dutch divorce legally valid in Egypt. Or they might draw on their ability to help or serve Egyptians in order to make a living, as the directors did, and as Paul did,

who had been trained as an engineer, but ended up working as a translator.

In this same world, Dutch policy makers have become wary of immigrants organizing on the basis of their 'nationality', but still want to address the problems to do with immigrants. This conundrum has led to contemporary integration, neighborhood based and target group policies, which on paper group together people on the basis of their supposed difference, but not, or at least not only, on the basis of their nationality. Street-level bureaucrats tasked with creating cohesion across difference, or to target specifically problematized groups found it difficult to do so without tapping into networks based on nationality. This goes to show that, in a world of nation-states, trying to prevent people who are socialized to identify with a certain nationality from connecting to each other is an uphill battle. Fighting this battle, street-level bureaucrats would sometimes reach out to so-identified key-figures (*sleutelfiguren*), like the directors with whom I worked, to help them to access these hard to reach groups, knowing very well that these key-figures would predominantly connect them with people of the same nationality, simply because that is how the world is organized. The people they were supposed to reach would not necessarily be interested in the kind of activities that were organized this way, but in some cases, the directors would promote them as though they would be of interest. Or, alternatively, the directors would compel people by promising to help them with their everyday troubles, a kind of service that was probably as high in demand as hanging out together to eat food.

Consider the dinner gone wrong organized by Malika. First, this dinner was funded by the neighborhood center, which would have presented dinner to demonstrate they deserved renewed budget from the municipality, while also showing Malika that they were deserving partners to work with. However, if their money came with too many constraints, as it did, directors like Malika could decide it was a dead end, as she indeed ended up doing a few weeks later, which meant that the center also lost her as a potential showcase of during the next application for municipal funding.

Second, it provided an opportunity for Malika to prove that she could actually attract hard to reach people, which is an actual term in Dutch policy talk, and connect them to others, and thus to appear deserving of future funding. It also provided her with an opportunity to show to the Egyptians that she was seeking to organize for that she could actually get funding for something worthwhile, making her deserving of future visits, and thus strengthen her position vis-à-vis the other associations. Then again, when she failed, she lost credibility from her funders, co-organizers, and attendees alike.

Third and finally, it gave attendees the opportunity to show Malika that they would show up, and were thus deserving of her future support, which she offered, and immediately provided

when that fight broke out. They could have also shown her co-organizers and funders that they were actually making an attempt to connect to others, but they did not, I assume because they felt that these co-organizers did not have much to offer, which I did not think they had either. This, then, is also why some of these people are considered hard to reach.

Bahaa and Gamal, Ali, Karima, and Malika run their associations with varying success, but they all had been in business a long time, and were recognized, if not always respected, for it. They enjoyed a certain status, and they used this status to narrate themselves as being better-educated and therefore better-adjusted to life in the Netherlands than the less-educated and less-integrated Egyptians for whom they were organizing. Then again, they called the other directors pretentious, and more than once suggested that they took money from foreign funders and/or misused funds made available by the municipality. In the same breath, they depicted successful Egyptian business owners as nouveau riche, that is, wealthy, but uneducated and uncultured. The business owners did not seem too concerned.

2.5 Egyptian snackbars

While some people were setting up associations, a small group of apparently more savvy Egyptian businessmen helped introduce and develop the concepts of 'Italian' and 'Argentinian' restaurants, ice-cream and Nutella shops that nowadays dominate the city center of Amsterdam. In general, these men were not so interested in involving me in their everyday lives, I suspect because their wealth allowed them to solve their problems in other ways. In the 2010s, these Egyptian owned eateries in the city center acquired something of an iconic status through a series of articles in the Amsterdam-based newspaper *Het Parool* accusing Coptic businessmen of using foreign money to pay above market prices to create a monopoly in the city center[7][8]. Around the same time, the national labor authority (*arbeidsinspectie*) began to step up its inspections of working conditions and working permits, and while this may be unrelated, the snack bar owners I talked to certainly did not think they were. As far as I know, the formal investigations never substantiated any of the rumors, but in the meantime, the inspections, or *controllaat*, as my interlocutors referred to them, meant that the snack bar owners as well as their employees had to be on guard constantly. This made them less than ideal for the kind of deep hanging out

[7] https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/schimmige-overnames-zetten-leefbaarheid-zeedijk-onder-druk~b8810d8e/?utm_source=link&utm_medium=app&utm_campaign=shared%20content&utm_content=free

[8] https://www.parool.nl/columns-opinie/koptische-ondernemers-op-zeedijk-wij-verdienen-eerlijk-ons-brood~be986e0f/

that I intended to do, and in the end, I only occasionally spent time there.

In the spring of 2017, when I already knew that I was not going to do much fieldwork at these snack bars, a friend who worked for the anti-crime unit of the municipality reached out to me because they had heard about my research and was wondering if I could keep an eye out for money laundering. I of course refused, and never spoke to them again. In 2019, a year or two later, after yet another inflammatory piece in *Het Parool*[9], one of the very successful Coptic businessmen reached out to ask me to write a rebuttal letter. This request also made me uneasy. I did feel like Coptic businessmen were unjustly portrayed, but I did not want to write such a letter without researching the finances at least a little bit, and I did not want to do that research. In the end, I politely told this businessman that I did not know enough to write the letter, but that I could lend him language skills. I did not hear from him again, but in November 2019, *Het Parool* published an article that repeated the arguments that the man had expressed on the phone and ended with a short statement by the journalist himself saying that a Friday night spent in the city center indeed indicates that the Egyptian owned eateries bring in incredible amounts of money[10].

The businessmen in the city center by and large tried to stay away from their fellow countrymen, researchers, and policy makers, but when their success was cast as suspicious, they were compelled to participate in narrating the story of Egyptians in the Netherlands. As they did, they set themselves apart from other, less savvy and thus less successful Egyptians. I did not engage much with the more prosperous businessmen, in part because they did not need my help as much, and in part because they were more apprehensive about researchers. I did talk to a few, though, and in general, they attributed their achievements to persistence and acumen. In addition, the Coptic entrepreneurs I spoke to specifically attributed their success to the fact that they had not invested in Egyptian real estate as Muslim entrepreneurs had, which had turned out to be a smart decision, at least financially.

At the associations, in those rare but cherished moments that Egyptians were able to spend some time together, to eat, gossip, reminisce, and remind each other what was unique about themselves, men often drew on the image of the savvy and prosperous Egyptian businessmen to present Egyptians, and thus themselves, as model minorities. In doing so, they also distinguished themselves from the general figure of the immigrant on benefits, and more specifically, from the Moroccan guest-workers who they said were recruited by the Dutch government to

[9]https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/zwart-geld-in-de-horeca-waar-komen-al-die-pizzerias-vandaan~b302e5b5/

[10]https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/witwassen-egyptische-ondernemers-zijn-insinuaties-beu~be024eaf/

work for Dutch companies and 'Syrians' who they said came as refugees and were given benefits and social housing. I was uncomfortable with these images, and often suggested that they were merely repeating stereotypes, and pointed out the many Moroccan and Syrian run businesses. As a result, I found out how invested the people I worked with were in not being like 'Moroccans'. I was often unironically reminded that as descendants of the pharaohs, Egyptians were the heirs of seven thousand years of civilization, whereas Moroccans in the Netherlands came straight from the Atlas Mountains, and therefore had some catching up to do. In addition, Egyptians Copts added that 'they' were already Christians before Europeans were, while some Egyptian Muslims suggested that the way in which Moroccans practice Islam was in fact un-Islamic, which is a discourse that circulates in Egypt too, but in the Dutch context, implicitly blames Moroccans for the bad image of Islam in the Netherlands. In their effort to distinguish themselves from Moroccans, my interlocutors also reproduced stigmatizing images of Moroccans as taking advantage from welfare resources, as bad parents, and as terrorizing the neighborhood, and drew on these images to question the extent of racism in the Netherlands, as Sama did during her interview with Moataz Rageb that I joined.

> Sama: I don't know about racism. I don't know. For example, with those Moroccans, well, sorry for saying it, but they just ask for it. They just sit at home, taking their subsidies, sending their children out on the street to terrorize the neighborhood. I mean, they can't help it, they came from the mountains without any education, and they only came to get rich. But what they need is an education. Because, for now, well, sorry, but I understand Geert Wilders, I really do. I mean, everyone would become racist with these Moroccans.

In practice, Egyptian Muslims in the Netherlands actually live in close proximity to Moroccans. They attend Moroccan-run mosques, send their children to Moroccan-run Islamic primary schools. Sama was no exception. Actually, she was married to, and had two sons with, a Moroccan-Dutch man, and right after saying what she said, she said that she feared that her sons were treated "as if they were one of them". I often encountered this fear of being treated as a Moroccan, suggesting an acute awareness that regardless of how they felt, in everyday life, they would still be mistaken for or likened to Dutch-Moroccans. It also suggests a keen sensitivity to the detrimental consequences.

My interlocutors also distinguished themselves from the Dutch through the image of Egyptians as light-hearted, hospitable and family oriented, and the Dutch as punctual and efficient but also individualistic and cold. They were above all horrified by parents who push their children to move out after finishing high school, and adult children who let their elderly parents

live in care homes and without even visiting them. These narratives evoke discourses about the Netherlands and Europe in general that circulate in Egypt, but in the Dutch context, they offered a positive spin on the stigmatizing discourses on Arabs and Muslims, which frame Arab and Muslim family as oppressively patriarchal, in order to frame Dutch families as emancipated.

The distinction between formal citizenship and nationality/ethnicity/race placed Egyptian citizens of the Netherlands outside of the nation, but the distinction also provided space for a more positive self-identification, and for distancing from (even more) stigmatized people. The people I met at the different associations where I conducted my fieldwork embraced this opportunity by presenting Egyptians, and thus themselves, as more hospitable and family oriented than the Dutch and as more entrepreneurial and educated than the Dutch-Moroccans. This was an understandable but in my view ultimately futile if not harmful balancing act, between on the one hand appropriating stigmatizing discourses of Muslim and Arab families, and on the other hand reproducing stigmatizing discourses of uncivilized, and welfare reliant Moroccans. In my reading, this balancing act was futile because no matter how well executed, Egyptians would still be grouped together with Moroccans and Syrians through policies targeting disempowered Arab women, uninvolved Arab fathers, or parents of radicalizing Muslim youth. It was harmful because by favorably comparing Egyptians and thus themselves to everyone else, they legitimized nationalism, and thus the exclusion and marginalization of the real, undesirable, or undeserving immigrants, in short, the third world looking people.

2.6 Immigrants as third world-looking people

Research homogenizes immigrants, or specific groups of immigrants, by particularizing 'them' vis-à-vis other immigrant Others and natives (Schinkel, 2018). In the case of Egyptians in the Netherlands, research made them stand out as "entrepreneurial" (Choenni, 1993; 1997; Rath, 2002; Fijnaut and Bovenkerk, 1996), as Christians fleeing Muslim oppression (de Wit, 2002; 2004), and as men who were relatively likely to marry and divorce women born in the Netherlands and as women who have comparatively many children (de Valk, 2004). I met exactly one family who neatly fitted this general description of a Coptic man who had married a Dutch citizen out of convenience, divorced her after becoming a Dutch citizen, married a Coptic woman from Egypt, with whom he had five children, and in the meantime ran a successful company.

The others whom I met deviated from this general picture in at least one way, and often in so many ways that they almost fell outside the scope of Egyptians in the Netherlands and were more in keeping with the international student or expat. This included Paul, who passed

as Dutch, an Egyptian woman who studied at the University of Amsterdam and reached out to me to get to know more about my research, and a young Egyptian man who worked for booking.com and joined my Wednesday evening football group, among many others.

The Egyptian international students and high-skilled workers whom I met avoided Egyptian snack bars and associations. This had to do with the sharp Egyptian class distinctions, but I believe it also had to do with these differentiated categories. That is, while I do not think that these students and high-skilled workers would have necessarily enjoyed seeking out the directors of the different associations, I can imagine that if they had to pass an integration test, they might have reached out to the people who had already been in the Netherlands for decades and knew how to navigate the bureaucracy.

The directors of the associations whom I talked to knew about these kinds of people, too. However, these people were not the people they could possibly organize, because they were not targeted as immigrants by policy makers or by researchers, and because they were not the kind of Egyptians they saw themselves advocating for. The Egyptians who were excluded from the story were also happy to remain outside of that general subject space of Egyptians in the Netherlands, and in the subject space of a Dutch family man (Paul), international student, or expat. As I will describe in more detail later, while telling this story, 'they' – the directors, international students, and expats – set themselves apart from 'them', the Egyptians who were less educated, less integrated, and therefore needed support. In the process, they played into the idea of real immigrants as 'third world-looking', that is, lower class and racialized as non-white, as well as the further distinction between 'good' or 'well-integrated', or 'hard-working' and thus 'deserving' immigrant versus the 'bad', 'not-integrated', or 'not-even trying' and thus undeserving immigrant (e.g Yoo, 2008; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019). Indeed, in the Netherlands, and across the world, the attempts to manage immigrants have never been directed at all non-nationals, but always only at those non-nationals who were considered a threat. These have always been non-white and/or lower-class, or "third world-looking" people (Hage, 2009).

The ad hoc postwar policies were built on the mantra that the Netherlands was not and would not become a country of immigration, but only discouraged Moluccans and guest-workers from taking root. It did not discourage Germans, British, or Belgians from taking root, even though for a long time, each of them constituted bigger groups than the Moluccans and guest-workers combined. On paper, there were no policies dealing with the elites from the formerly colonized, but the experiences of Paul, who made a tremendous effort to pass as Dutch, suggest that they too were treated as outsiders. The civic integration policies that followed largely excluded high-skilled workers and further targeted non-Western migrants, which as Dvora Yanov

and Marleen van Haar (2013) amongst others point out, is code language for race.

These policies also distinguished between good and bad, or deserving and undeserving immigrants. The postwar ad hoc policies defined good immigrants as those third world-looking people who remained focused on leaving the Netherlands and bad immigrants as those immigrants who laid claim on the Dutch state. The minority policies of the 1970s and 1980s defined good immigrants as immigrants who organized themselves in cultural associations and used the advisory councils to influence local policies pertaining to them and bad immigrants as immigrants who either stayed home or sought state assistance. The civic integration courses of the 1990s defined good immigrants as immigrants who worked and knew their civic rights and responsibilities, while the civic integration courses of the 2000s and onwards added knowledge of Dutch culture and history to the mix, so that bad immigrants are immigrants who rely on welfare, do not carry out their civic responsibilities, and hold views that are at odds with the supposed Dutch norms and values.

The distinction between good and bad immigrants created additional possibilities for Egyptians to distinguish themselves from one another, and the people I met enthusiastically used these. The Dutch policies, then, produce immigrants as 'third world-looking people', but by distancing themselves from the real immigrants, people like Paul and the international students and high-skilled workers further define or at least sharpen the distinction between immigrants and non-nationals who, at least temporarily, come to belong.

2.7 Conclusion: (Dis)Connect

In this chapter, I examined how the figurations of the Egyptian snackbar and Egyptian associations, as well as the figures of the Egyptian entrepreneur and association director conditioned the lives of those identified as Egyptian in the Netherlands, which, as the story of Paul shows, is anyone who is or has been an Egyptian citizen and is in the Netherlands.

I began by tracing the histories of Dutch immigration policies and research. Reviewing the constitution of 1814 and 1815 and the civil code of 1838, I pointed out that there is no reason why residency, citizenship, and nationality cannot overlap, or even complement one another, as they did in the Netherlands at the time. I then mentioned the 1882 Nationality Act in order to make sense of the Dutch governments' treatment of so-categorized 'European', 'Indo-European', and 'Ambonese' repatriates as well as guest-workers. I then told the story of the minorities policies, which sought to prevent marginalization and segregation by stimulating social-cultural expression and political representation, the story of integration policies, which

seek to foster immigrants' participation in the labor market and cultural assimilation, and the story of target-group policies, which seek to address specific problems in specific populations, defined by the problem they represent.

These policies have had a profound impact on people's lives, but in hindsight, in each instance, policies were based on, and in turn reinforced nationality as the main marker of difference. Immigration policies and research concretely do so by homogenizing people who by most other measures represent a heterogenous group. In other words, by grouping together everyone of a certain nationality under one umbrella, they help to produce stereotypical notions and elevate certain kinds of figures that in turn shape the ways that people connect and relate.

The directors of the associations, as well as the studies they provided input for, helped to invent, authenticate, and popularize these notions and supposedly representational figures. My interlocutors drew on these iconic figures to distinguish themselves from other, supposedly lesser Egyptians, other and lesser immigrant Others, and the Dutch, who in some ways they also saw as lesser than Egyptians. In doing so, they played into the more general configuration of immigrant Others. By distancing himself from Egyptians who were still living under difficult material conditions and unenlightened, Paul played into the idea of real immigrants being "third world-looking". The directors further played into the ideas of 'good' and 'deserving' versus 'bad' and 'undeserving' immigrants, with 'good' and 'deserving' immigrants being those who are integrated or at least make an effort, and the 'bad' and 'undeserving' immigrants those who do no even make an effort, and instead appear in the 'wrong-statistics', as defined by research comparing people in terms of employment, welfare use, and crime rates. These attempts to distinguish themselves originate in the world of nation-states, but were ultimately futile, because target-group policies lumped them together anyway, as disempowered Arab women, uninvolved Arab fathers, or parents of potentially radicalizing youth, for example. They were also harmful, because they feed into inherently violent and exclusionary nationalist ideas.

Taken together, I showed how nationality based immigration policies and research connected and disconnected Egyptians from one another, from other immigrant Others, and from the Dutch. In the next chapter, I move on from thinking about integration and other target group policies that define immigrants as the Other within, towards thinking about more generic welfare services, which ostensibly group together immigrants and native citizens, but nevertheless make immigrant citizens stand out.

3

(Un)settling divorces

In January 2018, after formally finishing fieldwork, I visited the American University in Cairo for a five week Erasmus+ staff exchange. One morning, I was enjoying a cup of tea before class when a man sat down next to me. "Welcome to Cairo," he said, in Dutch, with a twinkle in his eyes. "Welcome to you too," I replied, in Arabic, and we both chuckled. He took my hand, introduced himself as Ismaïl, and made an announcement: "*Ik was ook Nederlander*", I was Dutch too, he said, searching my face for my reaction. "*Echt*", really, I uttered, switching to Dutch too. "Oh yes", he said, taking out his phone to show me a picture of his passport, which he apparently had ready for these kinds of occasions. "I see," I said. "But why did you say you were Dutch", I asked. "Well, I returned my passport to the queen and took my fuck off bonus", he said, using the Dutch phrase *oprotpremie*, which generally refers to redundancy payments, but is sometimes used to talk about the few hundred euros a month that the Dutch government offers to dual citizens in return for revoking Dutch citizenship and leaving the country.

I knew about the Dutch remigration scheme, and I had read that some Egyptian-Dutch citizens had made use of it (van Meeteren et al., 2013: 144). However, I had never met anyone who did, or who even seemed to entertain the idea, for that matter. No, the people whom I met who acquired Dutch citizenship seemed to cherish it, if only for the privileges it held, such as access to international mobility, the Dutch social services, and the European labor market. So,

Ismaïl intrigued me. What had made him revoke his citizenship for what he referred to as a fuck off bonus? How had he fared since? I would not ask such intimate questions to someone I just met, and I did not have to, for Ismaïl was already telling his story.

In 2016, two years before our encounter in that teahouse, Ismaïl was about to reach his retirement age, after which he would no longer be eligible for the disability and unemployment benefits on which he had relied in the years prior. Instead, he would come to rely on the Dutch state pension (AOW) and whatever pension he had saved for himself. This would not have added up to much, Ismaïl declared, putting his thumb and index finger a centimeter apart to indicate how little it would have been, before quoting the numbers. The math was complicated, but Ismaïl still knew the numbers well. For starters, Ismaïl would only receive 34% of a full state pension, or 400,- euros a month. This was so because, per policy, people accrue the right to 2% of a full Dutch state pension each year they legally reside in the country during the fifty year period prior to reaching their legal retirement age. Ismaïl had resided in the Netherlands for nearly 30 years, but he only managed to legalize his stay after thirteen, and so he had only accrued the right to a Dutch state pension for 17 years. Ismaïl had been legally employed for twelve of those seventeen years, and during those years, had paid a pension premium, like most employees in the Netherlands do. This way, he had saved for an additional pension of about 200,- euros a month. However, his ex-wife was entitled to half of it, because they had been married for the entire duration of his employment, and she had not been employed during that time. All in all, Ismaïl had been looking at a life of scraping by on his own, so when he learned about the remigration scheme, he took the opportunity of an additional few hundred euros a month in exchange for his citizenship. He was happy he did, he said. His adult children were still benefitting from their Dutch citizenship, and he was living a comfortable life out of his late parents' apartment in Cairo.

As Ismaïl spoke, I had the curious sensation of listening to a future version of the divorcing and divorced men whom I had met in Amsterdam. As said, they never talked about taking what Ismaïl referred to as a 'fuck off bounty', but like Ismaïl, they had worked in physically demanding jobs until their bodies gave in, and while they had not reached their retirement age yet, they were already living a life of scraping by on their own. Had Ismaïl felt as abandoned by the Dutch state as they had, I wondered, and what had happened to his ex-wife? Would Hamza, Mahmoud, Bahaa, or any of the other divorced men I met end up making use of the remigration scheme too?

I had not planned to work with divorcing men and women, but a few months into my fieldwork, I noticed that the people who gravitated towards me were all divorcing or recently di-

vorced. Of course, this was no coincidence, but rather a reflection of how unsettling divorce was, and how desperate divorcing Egyptians were for someone to talk to outside of their immediate circles, and for someone who could help them make sense of and act upon the state institutions and actors that came to structure their life with an overpowering force. I made myself available for both, and as a result, saw unfold or otherwise gained intimate knowledge about over a dozen divorces. In this chapter, I describe these divorces in order to investigate welfare provisions as a sorting mechanism that reflects and reproduces hierarchical social citizenships, and as a set of conditions through which Egyptian-Dutch citizens made sense of their standing in the Netherlands, and under which they made their lives as Dutch citizens.

Nota bene, in this chapter I present the divorces of Egyptian Muslims in Amsterdam. I primarily worked with Egyptian Muslims and much less with Egyptian Copts anyway, but in this case, it is also because Coptic legal doctrines do not sanction divorce. Of course, this does not mean that Coptic couples did not separate, or even divorced under Dutch law, but my impression was that it happened much less, and it was definitely much less talked about, perhaps also due to the taboo on divorce.

3.1 Social citizenships

In his classic treatment of citizenship in the United Kingdom, Thomas Marshall (1950: 80) suggests that, following the institution of legal and political citizenship, the introduction of welfare services instituted social citizenship. This, social citizenship, may be defined as a relation between the state and citizens in which the state is responsible for upholding and promoting citizens' social rights, defined as "the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society."

T.H. Marshall's analysis of welfare services has long been complicated by Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial and critical-race scholarship (Williams, 2001). Marxist scholars have interpreted welfare as a system of social control designed to pacify the labor force and create consumer demand (e.g. Alber, 1988). Feminists have shown how welfare services have instituted the norm of the male breadwinner and the female childrearer and homemaker (Pateman, 1998; Orloff, 2009). Critical race and postcolonial scholars have pointed out that indigenous, enslaved, and illegalized people have been denied welfare services and thus social rights, while also showing how welfare works to further marginalize citizens, and racialized them as "non-white" or "with a migration background" (Gail, 1998; Bhambra and Holmwood, 2018; see Chapter

Two).

Together, these bodies of work show how welfare unequally distributes social rights, or produces and reproduces hierarchical social citizenships, to use the language of Marshall (1950). In my reading, they also reveal the actual mechanisms through which social citizenship becomes hierarchical. First, eligibility criteria group together people on the basis of (a combination of) certain characteristics, such as residency status, income, wealth, personal status, ability, and age, which become the grounds for unequal treatment, even if people are unequally treated in the name of equity. Second, welfare provisions define what a modicum of social security is for differently categorized people, and in doing so, shape the material conditions under which welfare recipients live their lives. Third, for welfare recipients and services users, the terms and conditions of provisions become the social responsibilities that complement social rights. In order to make sense of today's eligibility criteria, material provisions, and terms and conditions, I briefly sketch the historical making and remaking of Dutch welfare. I begin where I began to learn about welfare, which, in a telling fact of my privileged upbringing, was not in everyday life, but in high school.

In high school, I learned that, in the Netherlands, the Marshallian idea of social rights began to take hold in the second half of the nineteenth century, although I did not learn about it in those terms. This was right when 'natives' in the Dutch colonies were legally reduced to residents rather than citizens (see Chapter Two), but that was not something I learned about in high school. I specifically and most extensively learned about Van Houten's law (1874), which prohibited certain forms of child labor, and which continues to feature as a hallmark change in the historiography of Dutch welfare provision. I also learned about the 1901 workmen compensation and compulsory education acts, as well as various insurance schemes covering invalidity, old age, and sickness emerging at the time.

At university, I was invited to rethink Van Houten's law, as well as the various insurance schemes that came after. I learned that these initial protections were not based on the principles of social rights, as I had imagined, but rather on the principles of just wage, for only wage earning workers were eligible (van Oorschot, 2006: 58). As a result of the gendered divisions of labor, this meant that men were the main beneficiaries of social protections, while women in need continued to rely on (religious) charities (Knijn, 2008). I also learned that these provisions were accompanied by paternalistic efforts to modernize the working classes, and that efforts predominantly targeted women in their role as mothers and homemakers, thus making them responsible for the unpaid work of reproduction (De Regt, 1984). It was not until well into my PhD research that I realized that indigenous and indentured workers in the Dutch colonies

were probably excluded from these schemes, and instead targeted by the kind of paternalistic 'civilizing' policies that would later inform minority and integration policies (see Chapter Two).

In the 1930s, the emerging figure of the retired poor fueled existing debates about the inherent shortcomings of a wage based system of social security. In 1943, taking the opportunity of the Second World War, the Dutch government in exile in London set up a committee to lay the grounds for a new social security policy. In line with emerging norms in London at the time (see also Marshall, 1950), this committee concluded that "society, organized in the state, is liable for the social security and protection against want of all its members, on the condition, that citizens themselves do all that can be reasonably expected in order to acquire such security and protection" (van Rhijn Commission 1945, cited in van Oorschot 2006: 59).

In the decades that followed, building on this idea of social security and protection for all against want, subsequent Dutch governments developed an expansive web of tax-based welfare provisions in what Wim van Oorschot (2006: 60) calls a process of "collectivization and solidarization". The so-called guest-workers were also eligible for these provisions, but the descendants of enslaved and indentured workers living in Dutch Surinam and the Dutch Caribbean, who were residents and not citizens of the Netherlands, were not. Moreover, while the introduction of care oriented welfare provisions created work opportunities for women in particular, this wave of nation-based social and economic welfare rights also instituted the heterosexual family, most notably the norm of the male breadwinner and female childrearer and homemaker (Knijn, 2008).

In the 1970s and 1980s, rising needs due to staggering unemployment, second wave feminism, and the idea that former guest-workers were staying in the Netherlands to benefit from welfare services converged to mainstream the idea that further expanding the welfare state was economically unsustainable and that welfare provisions created undesirable dependencies and were insensitive to people's personal needs (van Oorschot, 2006: 60). In response to these debates, subsequent Dutch governments vowed to increase the gap between wages and benefits. This was meant to encourage people to work instead of relying on benefits, while making welfare provisions more efficient by introducing specific services for specific target groups. These latter included, among others, the labor market integration programs for unemployed and disabled people, women empowerment programs, and the so-called minorities policies discussed in Chapter Two.

In the 1990s, these ideas further dovetailed with a new belief in market solutions, spurring the privatization of welfare and especially healthcare services, giving rise to a wealth of corporate service providers competing for both funding and citizen-clients, and to intricate corporate-

government partnerships. In the meantime, in line with the more general move towards governing through community throughout Europe (Rose, 1996), governments began to promote what would become known as the *participatiesamenleving*, a big society in which people take care of each other before looking to the government for help. As part of this endeavor, governments began to transfer responsibility for welfare from the national to the municipal level through subsequent versions of the so-called *Wet Maatschappelijke Ondersteuning* (Social Support Act). Concretely, in 2007, responsibility for domestic care was transferred to municipalities, and in 2015, this was followed by the transfer of child and youth care, and care for people with a disability and long-term psychological problems. This was framed as a way to allow healthcare and welfare providers to develop locally specific programs and offer tailor made solutions, which was supposed to improve services, and make them more cost-efficient (Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2018).

The wide variety of policies, organizations, programs, and actors hinted at above tends to be lumped together under label "welfare state" (*verzorgingsstaat* in Dutch), both by sociologists and political scientists, and by politicians and social commentators more generally (e.g. Esping Andersen, 1990). Reflecting a more general reluctance to evoke the state, as well as an initial lack of interest in the global north, anthropologists have not engaged much in these discussions, either in the Netherlands or beyond. Instead, they have empirically studied how specific welfare programs and services are developed, put into practice by street-level bureaucrats, and subsequently experienced by recipients. In doing so, they have charted the process by which grand ideas get refracted into locally specific practices (e.g. Koch, 2018) as well as locally specific interpersonal entanglements and generally unruly effects that they bring about (e.g. Vollebergh, de Koning, Marchesi, 2021). Zooming out to bring the variety of practices into view, anthropologist Tess Lea (2020) conceptualizes welfare as an ecosystem of interrelated infrastructures and actors, that taken together, are beyond anyone's direct control. In this chapter, I take inspiration from Tess Lea's work to conceptualize welfare as the conditions within which marginalized citizens make their own histories. To do this, I briefly summarize the welfare ecosystem that the history sketched above has brought about.

The Dutch government remains committed to a modicum of welfare and social security for all citizens. To this end, the Dutch unemployment bureau (UWV) provides generic and more specific unemployment benefits, while the Tax Office provides more specific healthcare and rent benefits to people below a certain income. Meanwhile, as a result of the privatization of service provisions, the number of service providers has mushroomed, creating a web of organizations providing specialized services to very specific categories of people. Together, this creates

an image of excess, a wealth of provisions. However, in specific domains, such as benefits, social housing, and psychosocial care, efforts to curtail expenses and prevent undesirable dependencies have generally made provisions less accessible, less generous, and more difficult to use. First, welfare provisions have become less accessible due to more restrictive eligibility criteria and more elaborate application processes, most notably for unemployment and disability benefits (Hemmings and Prinz; 2020), and due to waiting lists, which have become notably long for social housing (Jonkman and Janssen-Jansen, 2018). Second, welfare provisions have become less generous, or, in other words the modicum of social security has been scaled down: benefits have not increased at the same rate as the cost of living has (Custers, 2023), while support services like legal aid have been reduced (e.g. Schnabl, 2022). Third, the terms and conditions of use have been made stricter, so that the balance between social rights and social responsibilities has shifted towards the side of social responsibilities (e.g. Simonse et al. [2022] on welfare benefits).

In sum, changing modes of welfare provision have widened the gap between what seems to be on offer and what is on offer, and between citizens and residents who turn to welfare in an attempt to improve the conditions of their lives, and those who already find themselves in more opportune conditions than those offered by welfare services. The process of separation and divorce brought this gap into full view, and thus became one of those processes through which my interlocutors learned about their standing as citizens in the Netherlands.

3.2 How (not) to separate, that's the question

The separations and divorces that I came to know about were all initiated by women. In the upcoming sections, I explain why this was the case. I will switch between writing from the vantage point of divorcing women to writing from the vantage point of divorcing men, not to justify any of the things that the people with whom I worked did, but rather to explain where they were coming from. In this section, I will explain why it was so hard for couples to actually separate, even if they both wanted to, and briefly sketch what separation involved for both men and women, before zooming in on the more personal experiences, and the details of negotiating welfare provisions in the Netherlands. Nota bene, this explanation is technical, and probably confusing for those unfamiliar with the Dutch system. However, I deliberately chose to maintain some of the intricacies in order to show how 'unruly' the system indeed is (Lea, 2020).

The divorces that I saw unfold were generally long in the making, but even if they were not, actually separating was hard, both for men, and for women. I suppose this is the case for most

separating couples, but for couples relying on benefits and living in social housing, this was made extra difficult because at least one of them would have to find alternative sources of income and housing, which was not impossible, but came with tremendous (social) costs.

In the Netherlands, welfare benefits are person-based, but eligibility and amounts are based on the incomes of other adults in the household. This means that, in practice, live-in adult children and partners of people with a high enough income are not eligible for benefits, and multiple-adult households relying on benefits receive less per person than single-adult households relying on benefits.

The divorces that I saw unfold were generally between a husband and wife who at the time of their divorce relied on a combination of disability and unemployment benefits. This meant that they had to formally dissolve their household before being able to afford rent for a second apartment, because only after dissolving their household would they both be eligible for benefits. To formally dissolve their household, one of the parties would have to formally register at another address. The most straightforward way to do so would have been to rent another place, and register there. Per their low income, they were eligible for social housing, which they probably could have afforded for a month or two until the dissolvement of their household was official. However, as long as their children had a place to stay, they were not eligible for priority on the social housing waiting lists, and so, social housing was out of the question. Renting on the private market was financially unfeasible, if only because landlords are allowed to implement a monthly income threshold of several times the rent, which effectively prevented the people with whom I worked from renting a place. One of the ways to circumvent this would have been to register at a friend's place. However, in practice, this was not an option, because if they would do so, they would formally become part of their friend's household, which would have an impact on their own and/or their friend's benefits.

As a result, for many of the men and women with whom I worked, the only way to formally dissolve their household was for one of the two parties to register at a homeless shelter. The person who would do so would have their benefits cut to a homelessness allowance of a few hundred euros a month, because they would no longer have to pay rent, as the reasoning goes, which of course meant that they could no longer pay rent either. The men and women with whom I worked knew all of this, so no one volunteered to do this.

In my experience, this stalemate only got resolved after women threatened to or actually involved the police. In the introduction, I already told the story of how Fatma forced her husband Mahmoud to leave the house by threatening to tell the police that he was planning to take her and her children to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. I also met women who threatened to tell

or actually went and told the police that their husband was abusive, which in some cases was true, but in others was not. However, regardless of the truth, in the heat of the moment, the police would have to take such threats seriously. Mahmoud and men like him knew this, and so they usually opted to leave the house before the police would force them, if only to stay on the police's good side for the process to come.

Technically, men could also involve the police on the basis of similar accusations, and I did hear rumors about a man who had managed to make his wife leave their home by telling the police that his wife was hitting the children, but I never met this man (as far as I know), so I cannot substantiate those rumors. The men whom I did talk to about this felt like involving the police was pointless. They assumed that the police would take their accusations less seriously, because they were made by a man and against a woman. And more importantly, they knew that in the ensuing process, their ex-wives to be would be appointed as the so-called resident parent, and in that capacity, would be granted the right to stay in their marital home, if only for the sake of the stability of the children, as I will explain in more detail.

If involving the police was effective, it was also risky, especially for women who were actually in an abusive relationship. As I will describe later, after threatening the police, Fatma lost not only her husband, but also the father of her children, as Mahmoud was literally struggling to survive, and in the meantime, struggled to be involved in his children's lives in the way that he wanted. If she had actually called the police, Fatma and her two children could have been taken to a safe house, in which case they would have been subjected to the safe house's rules and regulations. And in case her accusations had been substantiated, Fatma and her children would have been resettled, meaning she and her children would have had to start anew, in another unknown place. These were not risks that all women were willing to take, especially if they suspected that their children would end up holding it against them, and so women in abusive relationships were much less likely to involve the police than women like Fatma.

In the Netherlands, post separation co-parenting is the norm, but the children have to register at their primary residency (*hoofdverblijf*), so that one of the parents will become what in the United Kingdom system is called a resident parent. The divorcing mothers and fathers with whom I worked could not agree with their ex-partner on who would become the resident parent. They both claimed that they wanted to be with their children, and that their children needed them, but they also knew that as resident parents they would get to stay in their marital home, whereas their ex-partner to be would have to find alternative housing. Unable to agree, they would bring the case to court. In the cases that I followed, the judge granted primary residency, and thus the right to stay in the marital home, to the parent whom parenting professionals had

recognized as the parent who had been the primary caretaker up until that point. This was common practice, at least according to lawyers of the divorcing men and women with whom I worked, who told me that judges only divert from this if the primary caretaker is found to be unfit to parent, or if the second parent is deemed to be a threat to the children or their resident parent, in which case the children would be relocated to a new home at a location unknown to the second parent.

3.3 An 'Egyptian' divorce crisis?

After noticing that the people who were gravitating to me were all divorcing or divorced, and when I saw how unsettling these divorces were, I began to bring the topic up in my conversations with people who positioned themselves as community leaders. One morning, I asked Faiza about it over a cup of coffee. "Oh, yes, it's more than 80 percent," she said matter-of-factly. For a moment, I had the impression she thought lightly of it. But then she told me that she herself had been through three divorces herself, and that it had been incredibly hard on her. Curiously, others also mentioned divorce rates of 80 percent, including Gamal and Bahaa, although no one was able to point me to a reliable source. I inquired at the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS) which informed me that their indicators suggest Egyptians in the Netherlands are indeed more likely to divorce than average, but for various methodological reasons could not provide a specific rate.

I don't believe that 80 percent of the marriages end in divorce, but the fact that several people mentioned this number told me that divorce was considered commonplace. Divorce was a recurring topic of conversation at the different associations where I conducted fieldwork. At Etihad, I learned about men's perspectives, and at the other associations, I learned about women's perspectives, although they were not so different as I would have thought.

The men I worked with felt that they had not married in the right way. Indeed, as they explained to me, because of the socio-economic situation in Egypt and because of illegalization in the Netherlands, by the time they were ready to get married, "all the good girls were gone." Moreover, when they went to Egypt after all those years, they tried to present the image of the successful immigrant, for example by wearing a suit and tie and carrying a big bag of gifts, or by engaging in consumer practices that indicate an upper-middle class lifestyle in Egypt (A. de Koning 2009), like shopping at Carrefour or in one of the malls emerging in Cairo's suburbs, treating people to lavish dinners, and vacationing in Sharm el Sheikh or Hurghada. In doing so, they performed the idea of Europe as a place where hard and smart work pays off (Chapter

One; Schielke, 2020), which according to the men I worked with, attracted the 'wrong' girls, i.e. the girls who are interested in glamorous lives but do not make good wives.

The divorcing and divorced women I talked to confirmed that even though they had known about the hardships of immigrant life, experiencing it firsthand had still been hard. However, they emphasized that it was made harder by their husbands, whom they said had turned out to be quite different in the Netherlands from the men that had wooed them in Egypt. "Men are scared," one of the women I worked with said, "they want to keep us away from society, because they know that once we know the way things works, there is nothing that keeps us with them."

The men I worked with admitted that they were scared, and did not always know how to be a good husband or father in the Netherlands (see also Chapter Four). At the same time, they also felt that women jumped to divorce too quickly, and too recklessly, and some of the women I worked with actually agreed. "They think it will be easy," one woman told me. "They kick their husbands out, claim the kids and the house, and they think it will improve their lives. But it is not easy. It is hard work. And you will be all on your own. Sooner or later, you feel you need to get married again. I know, because that is what happened to me." Later in this chapter, I tell the story of Farida, which will counter this narrative. The men and women not only blamed each other or the circumstances of their lives in the Netherlands, but also Dutch child and family services, which made it seem like separation and divorce would be easy, which men described as 'feminist', and which women ended up experiencing as controlling but not very helpful.

Sociologists and anthropologists working on divorce have long noted that divorcees tend to tell the same story over and over again, using the same phrases, figures of speech, and metaphors (e.g. Hopper, 1993; Simpson, 1998; Qureshi, 2017). In her analysis of the stories that she heard from Pakistani divorcees in the United Kingdom, Kaveri Qureshi (2017) proposes to read these stories as part and parcel of the process through which people disentangle themselves from their ex-partners and previous lives, and through which they establish new relations, to themselves, others, and the world they live in.

I also understood my interlocutors' stories this way. As they talked about their own and other people's divorces, my interlocutors reflected on the struggle of moving to and settling in the Netherlands and of raising a family on unfamiliar grounds and with limited means. In the process, they established themselves as a people who had learned the hard way how to be a better wife or husband, mother or father, citizen, and ultimately a better person. In the same vein, they established the Netherlands as a place where hard and smart work might pay off, but which, in addition to being morally corrupt, also favored women over men, to the detriment of both (see Chapter One). And they elaborated a history of Egyptian migration and immigration that is

rooted in lived experience rather than the terms of reference of integration policies (see Chapter Two).

This lived experience narrative of the Netherlands as feminist and service providers as controlling resonates with the ways in which marginalized and racialized people across Europe make sense of their experiences with state actors. Melanie Griffiths (2015) found that the experiences of applying for asylum in the UK taught applicants that in the UK "man is nothing", Ester Gallo (2006) found that Malayali men in Rome narrated Italy as a place that is not good for men, and Insa Koch (2015) found that women in a council estate in London felt that the state had replaced the man. They also resonate with the discourse of men's rights activism, or the idea that men are in crisis because women get favorable treatment, not only in family law, but also in the education system and labor market (Jordan, 2016).

My interlocutors' narratives also resonated with the stigmatizing anti-immigration discourses that depict Arab and Muslim men like Mahmoud as oppressive (Pratt-Ewing 2008; Scheibelhofer, 2012), migrant women like Farida and even Fatma as needing saving (L. Abu-Lughod, 2002; 2013), and the Netherlands and Europe more generally as egalitarian or feminist (Dietze, 2010). In other words, while they may provide divorcing men with something to hold on to, they also contribute to an environment in which Fatma's threat to call the police was so effective, in which Mahmoud was kept away from his children on account of an accusation that even the police later said was not credible, and in which being a father of a Dutch child is not enough to get a residency permit (see the story of Ali in Chapter One).

In the next section, I move beyond narrative by zooming in on the various episodes of the separation and divorce process. I begin by describing my conversations with Farida, whose husband was incredibly violent, and who was looking for a way out, but who felt like the way out offered by Dutch welfare was not a way forward. I tell her story to explain why some women like Farida chose not to separate, and to counter the pervasive idea of Arab women as docile victims.

3.4 Between a rock and a hard place?

Farida first called me in February 2017. Speaking hurriedly, she described at length how stressful it was to live in a 60m2 apartment with four children. After about half an hour, I finally asked her why she was calling me. Without skipping a beat, she asked me to call her social housing cooperation to inquire about the possibilities of moving to a larger house. I don't have the language, she said, apologetically. I called but as I already knew, her housing cooperation did

not consider her family size a legitimate reason to move her up the waiting list. I sent her a text to let her know, and forgot about it.

I was re-introduced to Farida by Karima, one of the directors I was working closely with at the time, and who liked to give me tasks. Afterwards, when it was just the two of us, Karima told me to inform the Dutch embassy that Farida and her children were travelling to Egypt so they would support her if her husband tried to keep her there against her will. Karima was often forthright like that, and it always overwhelmed me. Unsure how to proceed, I clumsily told her I would give Farida a call.

Farida had been waiting for my call, she said, and before I could tell her about my conversation with Karima, she was already talking about her eighteen year old daughter who was applying for an internship in Spain so that she could leave the house, her sixteen year old son who would not leave his room, and her ten and twelve year olds who were already beginning to resemble their older siblings. It's my husband, she said, again and again. I did not say much, but when she said that something had to change, I asked her what she had in mind. She sighed, and said that she wanted to leave him, but needed to be sure that her children would choose to stay with her and that she could provide for them if they did. This meant that she had to travel to Egypt to gather her family's support and secure her assets, including her jewelry and an apartment that she formally owned but which she feared he could claim in case her divorce would not be recognized by Egyptian law. However, she feared that once in Egypt, her husband would take her and her children's passports, thus preventing them from returning to the Netherlands. This was why she wanted me to get in touch with the Dutch embassy.

I was not sure what to do. I worried that a message to the embassy like that would make it into some database from which it could emerge again to haunt Farida or her husband, whom I hadn't even met, let alone asked about his views on things. Still, I wanted to reassure Farida, so in the end, I sent an email describing the situation in general terms without identifying Farida. That same day, I received a short and crisp e-mail explaining that as soon as she set foot in Egypt, the Egyptian authorities would consider her an Egyptian citizen, meaning that the Dutch embassy could not put any claim on her. I was not sure whether this was true, legally speaking, but from the e-mail, it was very clear that Farida would have to do without the embassy's support, and I let her know as such.

A few days later, Farida called again. As I picked up, she was yelling in Arabic. "Stay away, stay away, stay away." Then, I heard a door slam. After, Farida started sobbing. After a minute or so, she began to explain what had happened. Apparently, her husband had been coming for her from the kitchen with a knife, but to her luck (her words), her son had unexpectedly entered

the room, after which her husband had left, slamming the door on his way out. I was utterly shocked and offered to help her and her children get out of the situation as quickly as possible. Crying again, she explained that she was not ready yet. Soon, soon, she said, before ending our call.

The next day, Karima called. She too had spoken to Farida, and was frantic. "This is it, we need to call for help," she said. I agreed, but at the same time, Farida had made it very clear that she did not want to be separated from her husband or children yet, and given the circumstances, I did not know any organization that would respect that wish. Well, we cannot sit and watch him kill her, Karima said, again and again, as I was voicing my concerns. I agreed, and suggested to ask Farida for permission to call Veilig Thuis (Safe at Home), the main organization offering advice and support to victims of domestic abuse. "Just call them," Karima said, but I did not. Instead, I called Farida, who swiftly rejected the idea. With Karima in the back of my mind, I asked Farida permission to call Safe at Home anonymously, to which she reluctantly agreed and which I then did.

After being on hold for about half an hour, a woman picked up the phone. She heard me out empathetically but when I was done, she said she was very sorry to tell me that Safe at Home could only act on the basis of a formal report, and that although they were reluctant to separate people from each other, they also had a duty to protect the people involved, so in case of violence, they sometimes had no choice. I asked her how a separation like that would work, to which she said that they would either work to remove the perpetrator from the home or, in case of more serious danger, provide shelter to the victim(s). I said I knew enough, and thanked her for her time. I called Farida, who was not surprised, and then Karima, who was frustrated. "These women are so scared to leave", she said. I too felt frustrated, and scared, for I felt utterly incompetent for the situation I was in.

Another few days later, I was woken up by a phone call in the middle of the night. I looked at my screen, saw it was Farida, and picked up, but found myself speaking to a police officer. He first assured me Farida was fine, but then explained that they had come to the house after multiple calls from neighbors. At the house, they had found a man going at a bathroom door with a knife. After removing the man, they had found this woman in the bathroom, who had told them to call me in order to translate. As he spoke, I could hear Farida crying and talking, but I could not make out what she was saying. As the policeman finally put me on speaker, I said hi to Farida. She continued to cry and talk, but I was able to discern that she wanted the police to leave so that she and her husband could resolve things. I did not think the police would grant her wishes, but I told them nonetheless. The policeman said he understood, and ended

our call. I stayed up for another hour, hoping to hear from Farida, but she did not call back.

The next morning, Farida did check in with me. Apparently, the police had taken her husband to the office. For the first time since I had met her, she did not have much else to say. I asked her if there was anything I could do for her, but she just sighed, so I wished her luck, and asked her to check in with me afterwards. A few hours later, Karima informed me that Farida and her husband were reunited, but that he had found out about me and had forbidden her to speak to me. I was worried but also relieved that I was no longer responsible for a situation I did not know how to handle. Then, another few hours later, Karima told me to look out for Farida at the market near the neighborhood center where she organized her meetings the next morning.

The next morning, it was raining heavily. I found Farida waiting for me at the entrance of the market. She was wearing a lot of make-up, but not enough to cover her bruises. I had never seen her like that, and not knowing how to conduct myself, I stupidly asked her how she was. She did not answer, but told me that she and her husband had agreed that she would travel to Egypt. That way, they could spend some time apart before he and the children would join for the summer holidays. She said she worried about the children, but was relieved to get out of her situation in the Netherlands. She then took out a folder with photocopies of their passports. In case you need them, she said. I took the folder, wished her safe travels, and took off.

For months, I did not hear from her. I wanted to call her but I was afraid that if I did, I would bring her trouble. Then, one morning, I ran into her at another market. She was with a man who I assumed was her husband, but she nonetheless approached me, on her own. After exchanging some pleasantries, she told me they had made up in Egypt and were committed to making things work again. I did not know what to make of that, so I just told her that I hoped that things would work out. She thanked me for everything, and that was the last time I saw or heard from her. I don't know where she is today.

In the months and years that followed, I kept on wondering if I should have done something different, and whether there was something that I could still do. Later, while writing up, I wondered how to write about her and her husband. Farida was only one of several women whom I knew who were abused like that by their husbands, and I felt like not telling their story would be akin to making it seem as if it did not happen. At the same time, having read Lila Abu-Lughod's *Do Muslim Women Need Saving* (2013), I worried that Farida's story would be interpreted as having to do with Arab culture and/or Islamic theology, rather than family history, patriarchy, or racial capitalism. Then, after reading Kaveri Qureshi's (2016) heartbreaking ethnography of divorce among British Asians, I decided to do as she did, namely to tell a story of domestic

abuse, and subsequently analyze it in light of how it resonates with popular discourses about Arab and Muslim men and women, as I am doing here, before contrasting it to the experiences of divorcing men.

Farida's husband was abusive, and Farida was his victim. However, she was not docile. In fact, she knew very well what she wanted, but in her attempt to try and get it, she found out that the help she sought was not available. I never had the chance to ask Farida why she did not want the help that actually was offered. Our conversations were of another kind, and frankly, in the circumstances that we were in, asking questions for the purpose of research was not high on my priority list. Still, from what she said, and from what she did to create the right circumstances to leave her husband, I infer that she did not feel like the help that was on offer would significantly improve the conditions of her life, while she feared that they could make things significantly worse. If so, then her actual experiences with reaching out to the available services must have confirmed her views: her housing cooperation let her know that they would not have access to suitable housing, the Dutch embassy let her know that they would not support her, while Safe at Home and the police let her know that they would separate her from her husband even if she did not want that (yet). In other words, Farida felt like her needs were not met, and that the consequences that came with relying on existing social services were not worth it.

Later in this chapter, I will share the stories of Bassant and Amira, two women who did divorce their husbands, and whose experiences further get at the reasons why women like Farida might prefer the life they are living over the life they might live after divorce. Before doing so, I move on the experiences of men, who post-separation, felt pushed to the edge of existence. I do so by picking up the story of Mahmoud, who felt like his social rights were violated, and asked me to help him reclaim those rights.

3.5 The edge of existence

I first met Mahmoud when I began hanging out at Etihad in January 2017. As described in the introduction, at the time, I could sense that some people had doubts about my presence, but that was not because of Mahmoud, who was actually one of the few men who always took the time to welcome me. In March, Mahmoud suddenly stopped coming. After a few weeks, Gamal felt it necessary to assure us all that Mahmoud was still committed to Etihad, but had to focus on his family for a while. Afterwards, I told Gamal to send my regards, and to tell Mahmoud to call me whenever he felt like it. I did not hear from him for a few weeks, but in May, he called me. On the phone, he told me what I already knew, namely that he had moved

in with his friend Bahaa after Fatma had threatened to call the police. From there, things had gone from bad to worse, he said, and now he wanted my help. I was available, so I suggested to meet him for a cup of coffee the next day.

As I entered the café of his choice the next morning, it took me a second to recognize Mahmoud. He had lost weight and his hair had turned grey, but what struck me most was his face, which was no longer soft and kindhearted, but harsh. As I sat down, he almost immediately began to share his side of the story. Apparently, after he had left the house, his wife had gone and told the police that he was planning to take her and their children to the Islamic State. The police had consulted the people at the Child Care and Protection Council (*Raad voor de Kinderbescherming*), who had started an investigation. Mahmoud had fully cooperated, he assured me, but pending the results, Mahmoud could only see his children in the presence of his family's so-called Parent and Child Advisor, who had been assigned to them months earlier, and who had become a trusted professional.

After six weeks, the people at the Child Care and Protection Council had reported that there were no indications that Mahmoud was planning to take his children to the Islamic State, or that he was planning to go there himself for that matter. However, they had also found that both Fatma and Mahmoud were involving their two sons in their fights, putting the boys at risk of developing attachment disorders. According to Mahmoud, this was not true. He had respected Fatma's wishes and followed all the orders of the police and other organizations, and the only reason he had done so was to spare his children, so if they were at any risk, then Fatma was to blame, he said. I never spoke to her, but I am sure she disagreed.

On the basis of the report, the people at the council, together with the people of Safe at Home and the Parent and Child Advisor, had told Mahmoud and his (ex-)wife to ask someone who they both trusted to help them communicate, and to find a neutral ground where Mahmoud could meet his children once a week. Mahmoud had proposed to communicate via Gamal, but Fatma had refused, and in the end, Mahmoud had reluctantly agreed to communicate via Fatma's sister, and to meet his children at her house, because he did not want to prolong the period in which he did not see his children.

In theory, Mahmoud would thus see his sons once a week, but in practice, he rarely saw them. Sometimes, Fatma's sister, Fatma herself, or one of the boys cancelled under the pretext of other obligations. At other times, Mahmoud cancelled himself, because as a de-facto homeless man he had to prioritize surviving, or because he was in such a bad state that he did not want his children to see him. "Look at me," he said, as he told me this, clearly aware of his changed appearance. But even when he did see them, he felt a distance. Normally, he would help them

with their homework, take them to football practice, or to McDonald's. Now, he was supposed to sit with them in the living room of their aunt/his sister in law. What was he supposed to tell them, he asked, without expecting an answer. Not knowing what to do or say, he sometimes left early, he admitted. Instead, he went by their school, to just chat, or if he had the money, to bring a shawarma sandwich he knew they liked. This was not according to the agreement, but he could not help himself, he said.

One time, Fatma happened to be there. When she saw him she had started to curse him, and then she called the police. He challenged her, he said, because if she had a meeting at school, he had a right to know about it, and why else would she be there, he asked. That had been three weeks earlier, and after that, she had completely cut him out. Mahmoud had called all the professionals he had phone numbers of, but to no avail. He had also called Gamal almost every day, but having gotten tired of him, he had told him to call me, so he did. "I just don't know what to do", he said, again and again. "Please help me."

The first thing Mahmoud asked me to do was to help him apply for a so-called social housing 'urgency statement' (*urgentieverklaring*), which are issued by the municipality, and reduce waiting times for social housing from several years to several months. I was skeptical, but I nevertheless made a call to get him an appointment for a so-called 'urgency statement advice interview' [*urgentieverklaring adviesgesprek*]. These interviews were set up as a preliminary check on eligibility. The advice was not binding, but negative advice was meant to prevent pointless applications, and Mahmoud and others saw positive advice as a necessary but insufficient condition for actually being granted an urgency statement. I describe the advice interview in much more detail in Chapter Five in which I analyze how my interlocutors sought to motivate state-actors to treat them well or at least better. Here, it suffices to summarize the meeting.

After Mahmoud made his case, the advice officer swiftly announced that so-called non-resident parents do not have a right to urgency on the basis of parenthood, as their children already had a place to stay, namely with their so-called resident parent. She then asked him about his medical history, prompting Mahmoud to describe how his back and shoulder injuries required him to get adequate rest, which he would not get as long as he was homeless. The advice officer did not seem convinced, but after informally advising him not to apply, she promised Mahmoud to formally advise him to apply. On our way home, Mahmoud said he understood he did not stand a chance, but he would try anyway. What else can I do, he asked, rhetorically. But don't fathers have rights, he suddenly exclaimed, as he began to speed up his car.

After the advice interview, Mahmoud began to involve me in his effort to set up his own halal meat import business. Much later, I learned that Mahmoud was formally enrolled in an

obligatory reintegration trajectory organized by the Dutch unemployment bureau. Apparently, his so-called reintegration coach had thought highly of his plans, or at least the fact that he was making an effort at all. However, at the time, he did not speak about this. Instead, he spoke of his efforts to set up a business as geared towards leaving something behind for his two sons, so that even if they did not seem to think highly of him now, later in life, they would come to appreciate that everything he had ever done, he had done for them. He made me work hard. Each day, there were calls to be made, places to be looked at, and paperwork to be done. In the end, he accumulated more debt than when he began.

In the meantime, he was trying to become the resident parent or the parent with whom the children primarily reside. As explained above, as a result of the interaction of division of reproductive labor within (Egyptian) families in the Netherlands and the laws and policies that govern separation and divorce, it is common for mothers to become the resident parent, even if co-parenting is the norm, at least on paper. After Mahmoud was compelled to leave the house, Fatma also had become the resident parent, because until then, she had been the children's main caretaker. This had also allowed her to stay in the house, and to stay involved in her sons' lives in a way that Mahmoud could only dream of. After hearing those same rumors that I was hearing about an Egyptian father who had become the resident parent, he started to believe that even though it was a long shot, it was worth the effort, because apparently it was possible.

The first thing we did was to talk to his divorce lawyer. She swiftly announced that he would not have a chance, but after he pressed her, she explained that since his sons were both at least twelve years old, he had two options. The first option was to make the case that Fatma was a threat to his sons' development. The second option was to convince his sons to declare to the judge that they wanted to live with him. Neither were likely to succeed, she emphasized, but after he pressed her again, she said that if she would have to advise him, she would advise option two, as the first option could cause much more harm. However, afterwards, Mahmoud candidly explained that option two was not a possibility, as he barely saw his children. How can I convince them, he said, and so he began the project of casting Fatma as a threat to his children. I told Mahmoud I would not help him to do so, but he did keep me up to date on the various meetings he had with professionals, which seemed to have little effect. During the court case that eventually did take place, the judge annulled their marriage and ruled that Fatma would remain the resident parent.

In those weeks and months, I saw Mahmoud's pain deepen. Sometimes, he showed his pain to me, most notably the time when his mother called from Egypt to ask about her grandsons, not knowing that her own son was not in touch with them. After ending the call, Mahmoud tried

to tell me he had not yet told his mother because he was overtaken by emotions. At other times, he did not speak to me or anyone for days, until he was ready to face the world again. At yet other times, he was frustrated, especially after the many fruitless meetings with the professionals whom he felt were deciding his fate without even listening to him. One time, after yet another one of these meetings, Mahmoud started to talk about that day many years ago when he became a Dutch citizen. He remembered it well, he said. After years of having been illegalized, and another few years of having been a 'dependent spouse' it had felt like a new start, he said. "After that, I never did anything wrong. I worked, paid my taxes, and respected the Dutch law. And now look at me. They are just leaving me on the street. They are taking my children away. How can they do that?"

It was in these moments that I began to think of separation and its aftermath as a "traumatic" experience for men like Mahmoud, in the sense that Rebecca Lester (2013: 753) writes about it, namely, as those experiences that "distorted, stretched, and tore" the bonds that tethered these men to life. Indeed, losing access to the spaces they once inhabited, losing their partners, losing touch with their children, while struggling to survive not only hurt, but also ate away their identity, and made them question the nature of the Netherlands. How can they do that, Mahmoud and other men with whom I worked used to ask, making it clear that they felt like their rights were being violated, while also suggesting that what was happening did not fit with what they thought the Netherlands was or should be.

As the Netherlands no longer made sense and no longer seemed right, Mahmoud, and the other divorcing men with whom I worked with, presented themselves as good husbands and fathers telling everyone about all they had done to provide for their wives and children, and by narrating everything they did in terms of getting back in touch with their children again. Telling these stories appeared to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it allowed these men to maintain a sense of self in a moment in which they did not feel valued by anyone else. However, on the other hand, it made them feel incredibly wronged, and, perhaps even more unsettling, made them feel like they may have been wrong about the Netherlands. Perhaps, it had not been a better launching pad for their future, as they once hoped it was going to be, and perhaps not even their children were benefiting from it (see also Chapter Four). These were scary thoughts to have, especially as there was no way back, and so, after disengaging for a few days, men like Mahmoud would re-emerge, to ask me to pick up the struggle of getting their lives back on track.

After months like this, Mahmoud suddenly announced that he was getting married to a widowed Egyptian mother of one, with whom he could move in. In general, getting their lives

back on track was a struggle without a clear path, or even goal, but for many of the men with whom I worked, it involved getting married again at one point or another, both as a goal, and as a means towards other goals, such as finding a place to stay, or becoming a father again. In the next section, I describe how getting remarried was eventually also an attractive option for many of the women with whom I worked.

3.6 Getting tied up in a web of welfare

If the divorcing men with whom I worked felt left behind by the Dutch state, the divorcing women felt like they were slowly getting tied up in a web of welfare services that spun around them and especially around their children. In Chapter Four and Five, I will describe in much more detail how mothers dealt with the state actors involved in their children's lives. Here, I tell the story of Bassant to describe how the experience of getting tied up in a web of welfare made them rethink their position in the Netherlands, just as men were rethinking their position in the Netherlands as they felt let down. I begin the story of Bassant from the vantage point of her ex-husband Hamza, because I only got to know her through him.

I met Hamza after one of the directors of the Egyptian association asked me to help him find his wife and two year old son whom he had not seen or heard from since the police had intervened in one of their domestic quarrels three months earlier. I told Hamza that I could not or at least would not do much to help him find Bassant as long as I did not know whether she wanted to be found. He nevertheless kept on inviting me for drinks or dinner. Sometimes, he asked me to call what appeared to be the general number of a random social help organization, but at other times, he just wanted to talk about what had happened.

Then, after a few weeks of hanging out, Hamza called me to tell me that some woman had called him to tell him that Bassant and their infant son Momo were in a nearby town. As I called the woman back on his behalf, we found out that they were actually in a women's shelter. This did not make sense to Hamza, who swore that he had never laid hands on her. If anything, she had pushed him a few times, he said. Ask her why, he said, again and again, as the woman on the other end of the line was already explaining herself. Apparently, Bassant had initially told the police that Hamza kept her locked in her room. She had then retracted her accusations, but had insisted that she could not go back to Hamza. At this point, the people at the shelter should have informed Hamza, but for some reason, had failed to do so, as this woman discovered after taking over Bassant and Momo's case. Hamza was enraged, and after seeing Momo a week later, he felt like things could only get worse.

In the weeks that followed, Hamza and I went to the shelter once a week, until one day, we found that they were not there anymore, but had been relocated to another shelter. Apparently, some observers at the shelter where they had initially stayed had been worried about young Momo, and now a spot had opened up in a more specialized shelter. Hamza was happy for Momo to receive the help he apparently needed, but was extremely frustrated with the fact that he had not even been notified of the decision. Is this how is it is going to be now, he asked, again and again, as we made our way back to Amsterdam.

After moving to the new shelter, two year old Momo was sent to a daycare with special needs and subjected to a few preliminary tests. On the basis of the outcomes, he was then sent to a child and youth psychiatry clinic in Amsterdam, where he spent several afternoons to be tested on ADHD and autism. Hamza and I went to a meeting at one of these institutions at least once a week, and, in addition, each Friday, we went to pick up Momo for his weekend stay over.

It took a while for me and Bassant to warm up to each other. I think she felt like I was on Hamza's side, and given how heavily involved I was with Hamza, I guess I did not have much to say to her. The first few times, I asked her if she consented to me being there, in Arabic. She confirmed, in English, but other than that, would not acknowledge me. Then, after we first saw her at the new shelter, she thanked me for helping Hamza, in English, a language that Hamza did not speak. After that, we began to exchange pleasantries, but our conversations only expanded after she and Hamza were invited to come and describe Momo's so-called family system at the child and youth psychiatry clinic.

Hamza often spoke about his and Bassant's history, about everything he had done to provide for her and Momo, and how wronged he had felt by her. However, this was the first and only time Bassant opened up in my presence like that. She spoke about growing up with an abusive Egyptian father and an emotionally absent Egyptian mother in Milan, about how she left them to study in Cairo, not because she liked Cairo, but because it was a culturally acceptable way to get away from them. In Cairo, she met Hamza, and their life had been perfect, especially when she got pregnant. But then, as an expecting mother, she felt like she had to return to Europe, for the sake of her unborn child, who she wanted to have all the opportunities in the world. In Milan, things had been like they had always been, and so she had sent Hamza onwards to Amsterdam. She followed a few months later, together with Momo. In Amsterdam, the three of them had been living in a 10m2 room in a house they shared with two older Algerian men. She had been so scared of them, she said, and how could she and Hamza have maintained peace under such circumstances? She wished Momo had not gone through all of that, but now that he had, all she wanted was provide stability for Momo, so she hoped she could move somewhere

permanent soon.

Bassant's story left a strong impression on me, but after the meeting, we all had to hurry to different meetings, so I did not have the opportunity to acknowledge what she had said. However, a few days later, we all met up for Momo's third birthday at an indoor play park. As Hamza and Momo were happily jumping around in an air castle, Bassant came to sit next to me, and asked me how the cake was. I said it was delicious, and took the opportunity to tell her how moved I was by her story. She thanked me, and told me that this was actually the first time she had talked like that. I do not want to be ungrateful, she said, but I just cannot bear staying in the shelter anymore. It's too crowded, too noisy, too much of everything, she said. I said I understood, and told her that the people at this center for child and youth psychiatry had indicated Momo needed a quieter place. I just need a break, she said.

In the summer, without telling anyone, Bassant took Momo to her parents in Milan for two weeks. For a day, no one knew where she was. As she returned, Bassant continued to speak to me, telling me she had no one else to speak to. She said she knew that she had been violating the shelter's regulations as well as the Dutch anti-kidnapping laws, which stipulate that both parents have to consent to international travel. However, she had reached a point where she did not trust herself not to become violent with Momo without a break from the shelter. She knew that Hamza would not understand, and she could understand that, but she just could not do it anymore, she said, and so she had just left. The trip had been tough. Visiting Milan always was, but she still felt recuperated, she said.

For Bassant, leaving behind Hamza and the 10m2 room in which they had lived had been an effort to take control over her life, but several months later, she felt like she was being held captive by her son, and the web of professionals involved in his life. This was a common experience among divorcing women. Amira, a divorced mother of three who already figured in the Introduction and will re-appear in Chapters Four and Five, once told me that before she got her divorce, she expected the Dutch state to be her husband, but discovered that "they come, one by one, listen to you, tell you they have a solution, but in the end, it's all just talk, talk, talk, and no action."

So, if men felt like their social rights were violated and their ex-wives social rights were met, women did not agree. Instead, they felt like their social rights were not met either, or, at the very least, that their social rights came with such a heavy bureaucratic burden and invasion of privacy that in the end, remarrying appeared easier. However, like men, most women ultimately felt like the only way out of their 'marriage' to the state was to remarry a man. Bassant long said she was not going to look for a husband, but as she kept on being dragged back into her role as

a mother, she began to look for a husband, not so that she could be a wife, but so that she could sometimes get time away from being a mother. Amira did the same, although she was much less optimistic than Bassant that this would indeed be the case.

3.7 Conclusion: Second-rate citizenship

In this chapter, I narrated my interlocutors' experiences with separation and divorce in order to shed light on welfare provisions as a set of conditions under which marginalized (Egyptian) citizens of the Netherlands live their live.

I began by analyzing welfare provisions as sorting mechanisms that (re)produce inequalities, by instituting eligibility criteria such as citizenship and residency status, income, wealth, personal status, ability, and age to group people together, by defining what a modicum of social security is, and by defining the social responsibilities that accompany social rights through terms and conditions of use. Second, I described separation and divorce processes that repositioned Egyptian-Dutch residents and citizens, in terms of social provisions they were eligible for and could access, and thus in terms of the social rights they enjoyed and the social duties they had to fulfill. Finally, I zoomed in on the stories of Farida, Mahmoud and Fatma, and Bassant and Hamza to describe how divorcing men and women made sense of this repositioning as they underwent it, and to show how this repositioning shaped the way in which they related not only to themselves and each other, but also to the Netherlands. I described how men's experience of being pushed out of their house and away from their children made them feel like the Dutch state was feminist, as several of my interlocutors put it. Meanwhile, the experience of getting tied up in welfare made women feel like the Dutch state was much more of a husband than they had wanted it to be, as Amira put it.

So, despite these opposing experiences, both divorcing men and women reached the conclusion that, in the Netherlands, you have to actively claim your rights. Depending on their situation, they acted upon this insight by engaging welfare providers, by trying to prevent themselves from getting tied up in welfare, or untangling themselves from it. Still, in the end, it was not so much a matter of claiming rights, but of making the best of life under conditions that appeared difficult to change. As a result of their particular positions, for both men and women, this often meant getting remarried. And for Ismaïl, with whom I opened this chapter, it meant accepting what he referred to as a 'fuck off bonus', accepting payment for repatriating away from the country to which he had emigrated.

The welfare provisions that I highlighted by describing the process of separation and divorce

are provisions that are available to citizens and legal residents only, meaning that people like Mostafa, Saïed, and Anastasia would not have been eligible. As such, they are part and parcel of the Dutch borderscape that I described in much more detail in Chapter One. As such, they purport to not differentiate between so-called native and naturalized citizens. Nevertheless, they did, both formally and informally. As a dual Dutch and Egyptian citizen, Farida would not enjoy the same degree of protection when in Egypt as non-Egyptian Dutch citizens would. Fatma's threats were so threatening because of Mahmoud's Arab and Muslim identity. Bassant was probably able to travel to Italy because she and her son were travelling on an Italian passport rather than a Dutch one.

Still, these are only a few examples of the ways in which dual citizenship and migration background may formally and informally shape the social rights citizens and residents enjoy, as the story of Ismaïl already illustrated. The people I worked with were not necessarily distinctly aware of these differences, but some were, and others found out only when they were relevant, or will find out, once they reach the retirement age. Bahaa for example, knew that as long as he held dual citizenship, his Dutch citizenship could expire, for example if he lived outside the European Union for ten consecutive years, or get revoked, for example if he would be convicted of committing fraud in his naturalization process, or if they became members of a terrorist organization. These were not immediate concerns to anyone I worked with, but it was one reason why I did not ask them any details of how they acquired citizenship. The people I worked with, including Farida, were generally aware that in Egypt, under Egyptian jurisdiction, they would be considered Egyptians, which meant that they would not be able to rely on the support of the Dutch state when in (legal) trouble. For women like Farida and for the more politically active people I worked with like Gamal and Bahaa, this was one of the reasons to not visit Egypt anymore.

This goes to show that, in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, citizenship is hierarchical, in the sense that different categories of citizens still hold different sets of rights, and conditional. In addition, in everyday life, those citizens who already hold fewer rights are also more likely to be denied the rights that they actually have, which was more of an active concern for the people I worked with. Indeed, in their everyday life, the people I worked with were more worried about how the general anti-immigrant, anti-Arab, and anti-Muslim sentiments, as well as systemic racism in the Dutch labor market and the education and judiciary systems was impacting them and their children, which is a topic to which I turn in the next chapter.

4

Children as the future

In Egypt, migration is scripted as a means for men to finance marriage and "open a house", or start a household (see Chapter One, Schielke, 2020). The Egyptian men I met at the different associations were among the men who had managed to do so, and the Egyptian women I met had joined their husbands in the Netherlands because they imagined that life in the Netherlands would be better for them and/or their children. However, by the time I met them, the men and women I worked with were disillusioned about the future that migration had brought about for them, and instead spoke about migration as a sacrifice for their children. They emphasized the hardship they had endured in order to give their children the opportunities they had never had, and how hard they still worked to raise their children into virtuous adults, who both conform to Egyptian norms and values, and do well in the Dutch education system and on the labor market (see Abrego, 2014 for similar narratives among Salvadoran parents in the US).

In the meantime, parenthood had connected parents to schools and a range of child and youth welfare and healthcare services and the people that represented them. As I will describe in more detail, in the name of equal opportunity, these organizations and professionals are supposed to pay additional attention to the so-called 'second-generation', as well as their 'non-Western' parents, who may not be equipped to help their children to take the equal chance the supposedly meritocratic Dutch education system grants them and/or are liable to transmit

'non-Western' cultural norms and values. Or, framed differently, these parent and child organizations and professionals increasingly operate at the intersection of the desire to ensure that all children have equal opportunities and the desire to reproduce the Dutch nation.

In this chapter, I take parents' and policy narratives as my cue to investigate the practices through which the idea of migrant parents as different materializes. Concretely, I investigate the inequalities that these practices bring about, the way in which they mediate relations, between parents and professionals, parents and their children, and fathers and mothers, and the way in which they feed off and into those self-identifications as a sacrificing parent. To do so, I draw on events and workshops for parents organized or hosted by the different associations where I conducted my fieldwork, and the meetings between the people I worked with and their children's teachers and associated welfare and healthcare professionals that I witnessed and participated in. I begin with a short overview of how (Egyptian) migrant parents figure in (Dutch) policies and research.

4.1 Children as the future

In this world of nation-states, migration has been conceptualized as imperiling the social-cultural reproduction of the nation (e.g. Erel, 2014; Luibheid, 2013), as well as the socialization of children into the family and the various social, cultural, religious, and political communities to which their parents belong (cf Feldman Savelsberg, 2016; Coe 2013).

In line with these concerns, the dominant line of research on migrant parents traces how the parenting practices of immigrants of different nationalities develop in comparison to 'native' parenting practices, e.g. by studying if and to what extent migrant parents adopt the parenting styles prevailing in their country of residence (e.g. Pels and Nijsten, 2017). In line with the larger immigrant-integration literature, this body of work not only glosses over differences within and similarities between national groups, but also treats 'native' parenting practices as the norm to which 'immigrant' parents should conform, (re)producing the 'us versus them' narrative in which 'we' are good parents and 'they' may genuinely care about their children, but do not take good care of them (e.g. van den Berg 2017).

Meanwhile, anthropologists have followed migrant mothers on the move to study how they transmit belonging from a distance and/or on the unfamiliar and sometimes hostile grounds of their countries of transit and destination (e.g. Coe, 2013; Gilmartin and Migge, 2016; Feldman Savelsberg, 2017). They found that, as they transmit belonging to their children, migrant mothers also produce and reproduce a sense of belonging for themselves, and not only through

their children and extended families, but also through the people they meet on the move and the professionals involved in their children's lives. I found that, for the people I worked with, parenthood kept alive the idea of a better future that had motivated them to leave Egypt in the first place. Still, despite their ability to transmit belonging, in a situation of legal precarity, many migrant mothers find themselves in what Soukaina Chakkour and Anouk de Koning (2022) call a space of hesitation as to where that future would be, 'here', in Europe, or 'back home'.

Feeding off and into these lines of research, policy makers in the Netherlands and across Europe have long expressed paternalistic concerns about the children of parent-Others (e.g. de Regt [1984] on efforts to 'civilize' working class parents; Stoler [2002] on efforts to 'civilize' native parents). Following the iconization of the 'unintegrated immigrant' as the quintessential Other to the Dutch norm (see Chapter Two), Dutch policymakers increasingly directed their concerns to the children of immigrants. These kids were seen as growing up in parallel worlds, and thus as both at risk and risky. They were at risk because as adults they would lack opportunities and civic values, and they were risky because as a result they could end up hanging out on the streets, terrorizing neighborhoods, resort to radical Islam or illicit money making, or depend on welfare services (Slootman and Duyvendak, 2016).

In this light, Dutch policy-makers began to see immigrants 'underuse' of child, youth, and parenting support services as part of the problem, because, at a distance, professionals would be less able to guarantee the safety and healthy development of all children and/or deliver necessary services (Ponzoni, 2015). This gap between immigrant parents and state-services, in turn, was seen as resulting from immigrant parents 'lack of familiarity with and trust in state services, as well as a general mismatch between available services and immigrant parents' needs and wishes (ibid). To bridge this gap, policymakers in Amsterdam began to incorporate immigrant associations in their parenting support programs (ibid). Seen as spaces in which immigrant parents already came together to discuss the challenges of everyday life, immigrant associations were supposed to become spaces in which policymakers, welfare professionals, and immigrant parents could (re)build relations of trust, so that policymakers and welfare professionals could learn about immigrant parents' needs and wishes while immigrant parents could learn about the available services (ibid).

The directors of the Egyptian associations where I conducted my fieldwork used this as an opportunity to organize or host funded workshops and other activities for immigrant parents. Over the course of my fieldwork, Karima, Malika, and Gamal and Bahaa all welcomed a representative of the municipality whose job it was to inform immigrant parents about, and help them apply to, various forms of financial support that they were entitled to by virtue of their

children, such as funding to buy a laptop for their children's schoolwork and sports activities. In a context in which immigrants' supposed overreliance on welfare benefits is seen as one of the main threats of immigration, the existence of such an officer took me aback, but reflects the concerns about children, and shows how that concern is at odds with the deep-logic of limitation.

On paper, and in practice, these workshops and the larger policy initiatives of which they are part draw on and reproduce stigmatizing images of Arab/Muslim fathers as authoritarian and absent, and of Arab/Muslim mothers as oppressed and submissive. As such, they put the onus of improving the lives of immigrant children on parents rather than the politicians and policy makers who have more influence on the structural forces that actually shape the lives of immigrant families in the Netherlands. At the same time, they also created a space for people who self-identified as non-Dutch parents to come together, and make sense of their experiences.

4.2 A clash of cultures?

In the spring of 2017, Gamal and Bahaa invited Trias Pedagogica to organize a workshop on involved fatherhood at Etihad. In the week leading up to the workshop, only one or two people showed up for Etihad's weekly meeting, fueling Gamal's and Bahaa's lingering annoyance with people's lack of investment. But, on the first night of the workshop, nine Egyptian fathers and two Egyptian mothers showed up, a decidedly good turn-out. At 7:30 pm sharp, Gamal welcomed everyone to this very important workshop, and after offering some initial reflections on the importance of strong families, gave the floor to Ahmed, the course instructor.

Speaking in a mixture of Fusha (Modern Standard Arabic), Darija (Moroccan Arabic) and Dutch, Ahmed welcomed the participants. He then introduced himself as an expert on intercultural parenting by training and experience, and the workshop as an invitation to participants to explore their roles as fathers. This began by recognizing that children grow up between their parents, their school, and their wider social environment, and that there are many ways of being a good father, but that at the very least, all fathers should be involved in the process of using 'carrots' and 'sticks' (incentives and punishments) to positively influence their children's behavior. Some participants nodded. Ahmed asked if there were questions, but no-one raised a hand.

As there were no questions, Ahmed started a first round of discussions by asking participants to share an experience to do with the challenges of raising children in between two cultures. This was really just meant to break the ice, he said. Ibrahim was the first participant to open up. As an Egyptian, he expected his children to treat him with respect, but in the Netherlands

children are raised to stand up for themselves and articulate what they want, and he did not know how to combine the two, he said. The other parents nodded. Mustafa shared a more concrete example. His nine-year old daughter was in a hurry to grow up, and after nagging him about it for months, he had recently allowed her to start wearing a hijab, a headscarf. She had been very proud, but when she ran into her neighbors, they had told her that they were sad to see her like that. This had upset them both, Mustafa admitted, and he did not know how to proceed. As the ice had been broken, one after the other chimed in. Mahmoud did not want his son to go to his stay-away school camp, but did not want to make him stand out. Tarek had been told to put his fourteen year old daughter on a diet, but as a father who was away at work most of the time anyway, he felt it was his task to spoil her, and his wife Somaya wanted to know how they could prevent their ten and eight year old sons from fighting with each other. Magdy worried that his children would want to live on their own after high-school, which he said was impossible. Amr said that he felt like his thirteen year old son was beginning to take some distance, just like his twenty-four and twenty-one year olds had done at that age. I cannot keep them inside, and if I ask what they are up to, they will not tell, he said.

Ahmed patiently listened, validated parents' feelings, and every now and then provided some initial advice, emphasizing the importance of consistency and of rewarding and penalizing behavior, not the person. After about two hours, Ahmed began to wrap up, encouraging everyone to keep the distinction between the person and their behavior in mind as they addressed the parenting challenges of the week to come. One by one, the participants thanked Ahmed for his insights and suggestions, and then left.

The Trias Pedagogica workshop is one of many workshops on intercultural parenting that frame immigrant parents and their children as caught between cultures (van Huis, 2018). This frame may easily be criticized for the way in which it conceptualizes culture and difference as static personal attributes (van den Berg, 2016). However, as the stories shared during that first evening indicate, for my interlocutors, 'culture' (*thaqafa*) was a welcome starting point to talk about the everyday challenges of raising moral 'Egyptian' adults in the Netherlands.

As I described in Chapter One and Chapter Two, the people with whom I worked readily imagined Egyptian and Dutch cultures as at odds with each other. As parents, they feared that their children would be morally corrupted, and that their attempts to prevent that from happening would end up creating tensions between them, their children, and the state actors involved in their children's lives. The challenge of raising children in the Netherlands, then, was not only how to transmit Egyptian norms and values without pushing their children away or alienating them from the Netherlands, but also, and perhaps most poignantly, how to do so while also pre-

venting negative responses from the Dutch. As the stories of the workshop participants' stories indicate, this was an everyday challenge.

The people with whom I worked readily shared these concerns among each other, but they usually refrained from opening up to professionals out of fear to create tensions or trigger unwanted interventions. I was surprised they opened up to Ahmed like that, but then again, Ahmed was not immediately involved in the participants' or participants' children's lives, and as someone who had identified as non-white, Arab, and Muslim, had moved to and settled in the Netherlands himself, or maybe just as someone who was extremely good at what he did, he was able to give advice without appearing judgmental, triggering an avalanche of questions that parents apparently had.

4.3 More than culture

On paper, workshops like the Trias Pedagogica workshop invited parents to discuss the challenges of raising children in between two cultures, but in practice, they also provided space for parents to discuss other kinds of challenges, and thus to resist the sole focus on culture. This became apparent during the second week of the workshop.

After the first week, in which he spent his time probing conversations, in the second week, Ahmed shared two videos and gave a presentation. The first video featured a Moroccan family. In the first shot, the father reprimands his son for returning home late. In the next shot, the boy's mother tells his father that he should not take his anger out on his son, only to be reprimanded by the father for getting involved. The second video featured five Moroccan men reflecting on their experiences raising children in the Netherlands, in Dutch. According to the first father, it was hard to raise children in the Netherlands because physically disciplining children is not allowed and, on top of that, Dutch teachers and policemen are too 'soft'. The second father found that children in the Netherlands are at risk because the small Dutch houses leave parents little choice but to send their children out on the street for several hours a day. The third father felt that Moroccan fathers should become more involved in their children's lives instead of pointing to external factors, while the fourth father claimed that most Moroccan men still had to learn how to raise their child in the Netherlands. The video ended with a fifth father who called on Moroccan fathers to stand up for their children more. We helped build this country, we have paid taxes, so our children should benefit like Dutch children, he said. As the second video ended we all applauded.

Ahmed then presented a two-dimensional parenting styles model, with one axis ranging

from '*laissez faire*' (laissez faire) to '*dwingend*' (controlling) and another from '*democratisch*' (democratic) to '*autoritair*' (authoritarian). Some parents want to know everything about their children while other parents give their children a lot of freedom, he said, moving his hand from controlling to laissez fair. Similarly, some parents decide everything for their children, whereas other parents try to reach a decision together, he continued, now moving his hand from authoritarian to democratic. Following the example of his own parents, Ahmed initially idealized an controlling-authoritarian parenting style. However, when he became a parent himself, he discovered that children also had to learn from their mistakes and to take charge of their own decisions. This was particularly so in the Dutch context, he said. Ignoring for the moment the statement of the last speaker in the second video, Ahmed explained that the fighting in the first video, and the challenges that the first two speakers in the video had experienced were the result of similar clashes between parenting styles, while the mother in the first, and the second two speakers in the second video were beginning to recognize that they had to adapt their parenting styles to the Dutch circumstances.

As Ahmed reached his conclusion, we applauded again, and some participants thanked him for his presentation. Then Bahaa stood up. Facing both Ahmed and the participants, he thanked Ahmed for the insightful presentation, and turning his gaze to what was now his audience, he told everyone to take note of what Ahmed had said. Then, returning his gaze to Ahmed, he said that to have a fruitful conversation, it was important to recognize the difference between Moroccans and Egyptians. We are different people, and came here at a different time and under different circumstances, he said. Ayman chimed in, saying that in general, Moroccans in the Netherlands are less educated than Egyptians, and therefore less focused on their children's education. This is the reason Moroccan children are on the street, he said. Still standing, Bahaa nodded, but returning his gaze to the audience, began to talk about the difference between Egyptian and Dutch families.

Dutch parents, he claimed, are smart. They have one or two children, nine-to-five jobs, and are dual earners. As a result, they have a good life, he said. Turning his gaze to me, he then began to explain Egyptian families. On average, Egyptians have six or seven children, he said. In the Netherlands, we have fewer children, but still many more than Dutch people, he continued. Still, Egyptian women are not supposed to contribute to the family income, while Egyptian men are not only expected to provide for their wives and children, but also for their extended families, he said, switching from 'we' to 'they'. On top of that, they want to travel to Egypt once a year and give their children every little thing they desire. So they always work, morning, day, and night, seven days a week. That's the problem, he concluded, finally sitting down. We all

returned our gaze to Ahmed, who said that Bahaa was right to point out that for many fathers, providing an income is one of the main ways to be involved, but emphasized that, no matter how hard they worked, there are always other ways to be involved too. The three women in the room smiled conspicuously to each other.

The videos, the two-dimensional parenting model, and Ahmed's presentation drew on the analysis of cultural differences to suggest that Moroccan parents should adapt their parenting style to Dutch circumstances. However, it left some space for other forms of difference as well, including socio-economic differences between Dutch-Moroccans and Dutch. Bahaa took this space to zoom in on the differences between Moroccans and Egyptians, which according to him were not merely cultural, but also brought about by migration histories, family composition, and employment. In the process, he discussed some of the structural reasons why the parents I worked with were actually more likely to become subject to the kind of interventions that they feared. As he spoke, I suspected that Bahaa was thinking of a family we had visited earlier that week. They had been in severe debts for years, and now their six year old son was struggling in school. To Bahaa, it was clear that what they needed was debt relief, but instead, the boy's school's care coordinator had sent the boy and his mother to an intensive parent-and-child workshop, which was just another obligation, which was probably the last thing they needed. However, in keeping with the Trias Pedagogica philosophy, Ahmed encouraged the workshop participants to focus on what they could do differently, rather than what was beyond their influence anyway, such as the way in which schools and child and youth care in the Netherlands are organized. Bahaa understood this well, and I suspect that this was why he did not make his views explicit, and why he did not talk about racism or discrimination, which he did bring up in other contexts. To explore how parents engaged with the topic of racism, I will move to the gatherings that Karima hosted at her association, Tamkin.

4.4 Racism?

In the spring of 2017, Karima received funding to organize workshops on mental health for migrant women and one on anti-radicalization for Muslim parents. She used some of that money to bring together a group of Egyptian mothers on Monday and Wednesday in a neighborhood center in Amsterdam Noord. For about two hours, they discussed a broad range of topics, over tea, coffee, and cookies. In addition to Egyptian and Dutch politics, their families and their everyday experiences with the Dutch healthcare system were among the most popular topics. At one point or another, the conversation always turned to Dutch institutions, in part because

Karima was one of the more vocal critics of the way in which some Dutch institutions operated, but more so because these institutions played such a central role in the lives of these mothers.

One morning, some seven mothers were discussing the Dutch healthcare system when Soraya, an outspoken mother of four in her late forties, shifted the conversation to her eighteen-year-old son, Mohamed. According to Soraya, Mohamed was applying for internships but was repeatedly rejected, even though his classmates had long succeeded in securing theirs. According to his mother, this was a clear case of racism. Her friend, sitting next to her, disagreed. "Mohamed is just lazy", she exclaimed. "You don't even know if he applied." "Everyone knows they won't take a 'Mohamed'", said another woman. "It took my son a year to find an internship", another contributed. Other mothers were more skeptical. "Only God knows what our children are up to", someone mused. Another mother shared the story of her neighbor's son. The boy had also claimed that he could not get an internship, although as it turned out, he had long been accepted but just did not like it. "Can you imagine!?" She sighed, shaking her head. Other mothers were more pragmatic. "Maybe he should look for Muslim businesses", one suggested. "Or just change the name on his CV", another added. "No, no, no", Karima protested. "Our children were born here. This is their country. Mohamed should be hired as himself, not as 'Jan' or 'Kees'". The women laughed. "So what am I supposed to do," Soraya asked. No one seemed to know, and the conversation drifted onto other topics.

A few weeks later, racism came up again when Ghada brought up the situation of her nine-year-old daughter Yasmin. When Yasmin was six years old, she was sent to speech therapy. According to her teachers, speech therapy would help her catch up with language. At first, Ghada was happy and hopeful it would benefit Yasmin. Three years later, Yasmin was still behind, and, recently, her teachers had suggested the option of a school for children with special needs. Ghada instead had Yasmin tested for dyslexia. The test results confirmed that she indeed had dyslexia. According to Ghada this showed that her daughter was not stupid but needed additional time. She had hoped that the test result would inspire her daughter's teacher to invest in her more, but to her astonishment, Yasmin's teachers had not believed the diagnosis. "These days you can buy any result you want", the teacher had apparently said. "That might be true", Ghada told the other mothers at the table, "but if Yasmin were Dutch, they would not doubt the results". This time, the other mothers unanimously agreed, and the conversation turned to the practical question of what to do. "This is unacceptable", one mother exclaimed. "You should go there and tell them." "Yes, tell them you will go to the police", a second mother said, with a twinkle in her eye. Everyone laughed. "No, seriously", the first mother persisted. "I think you should go there and take care of it." "I cannot just go there and start talking about racism",

Ghada objected. "They will not accept it. It will only create more problems for Yasmin".

As David Theo Goldberg (2006) has argued, in the wake of the Second World War and the unfathomable horrors of the Holocaust, race and race-thinking were never to have a place in Europe again (see also Lentin, 2008). However, as race and race-thinking were declared to be something of the past, enduring racial inequalities were denied as such and instead understood as class, cultural, religious, or immigrant problems (Goldberg, 2006: 356). This shift towards European "raceless-racisms" also led to a tendency to "personalize and individualize racism, to reduce racist violence to a few rotten folks, to restrict apartness especially in residential, educational, and employment arrangements and access to untouchable segregating schemas of personal preference and the lure of the familial and familiar" (ibid: 359).

These European dynamics played out in the Netherlands too (Essed and Hoving, 2014), where racism has been ignored, denied, and disavowed through claims of race neutrality, color-blindness and a discourse of tolerance (Wekker, 2016). Still, race was talked about, and in recent years, some of these conversations were mainstreamed, turning race and racism into topics of intense public debates. This has been ferociously so in the context of debates about the racist figure of Black Pete (Hilhorst and Hermes, 2016) and in response to emerging studies showing structural racism in the education system (e.g. Gemeente Amsterdam, 2007), the labor market (Andriessen et al, 2012), the police force (Çankaya, 2012; Amnesty International, 2013) and the tax-office (Frederik, 2020).

Next to the socio-economic structures mentioned by Bahaa during the Trias Pedagogica workshop, these reports and the public debates offer an additional explanation for why children like those of my interlocutors are more likely to end up on the margins of the Dutch education system and labor market. However, like many socio-economic accounts, they did not provide a satisfying or conclusive answer to why some of my interlocutors' children ended up at the margins of the education system and labor markets while others did not. Soraya and the women gathered around her knew that applicants with 'foreign-sounding' names were less likely to be invited for an interview than applicants with a Dutch-sounding name with a criminal record (van den Berg, 2017). They could not rule out the possibility that Mohamed was discriminated against nor could they dismiss the other alternative explanations for why Mohamed had not yet secured an internship that some of the other women readily provided. Indeed, in a context in which racism is not absolute, there are always alternative explanations.

This uncertainty is reminiscent of the post-civil rights United States as described by John Jackson. According to Jackson (2008: 9), after the 1960s, "African Americans have become more secure in their legal citizenship but concomitantly less sure about other things, such as

when they're being victimized by silent and undeclared racisms." Apparently, this uncertainty about racism gave rise to mistrust and fear, the bedrocks of "alarmist and conspiratorial attitudes and assumptions," turning racism into a "crucial explanation for social suffering and government disregard" (ibid: 2-3). Like African Americans in the post-civil rights US, Egyptian parents in Amsterdam entertained racism as an explanation for their suffering. However, while Egyptian parents were suspicious, they were not 'paranoid' in the way that John Jackson suggests African-Americans were. More importantly, while the African-Americans described by Jackson seemed to feel empowered by 'paranoia' in the sense that it made them feel that they were seeing the US for what it really was, reimagining the Netherlands as racist actually produced uncertainty about whether or not their children were discriminated against, and how to deal with that. Instead, this uncertainty may be best understood as a form of doubt.

Doubt, as Matthijs Pelkmans (2013: 3) points out, "connotes an active state of mind which is directed at a questioned object and is unstable in the sense that it pushes for a resolution." As such, doubt not only refers to the ontological question of "what is" and the epistemological questions of "what is true", but also, and oftentimes more pressingly, to the pragmatic question of "what to do" (ibid: 2). The people I worked with did ask the ontological and epistemological questions. However, these were scary questions, as the answer could be that the Netherlands is racist and that it is true that their children are likely to be sidelined, which would turn the hardship they had faced into just that – hardship – rather than a sacrifice for their children's future. The question of what to do was more hopeful, for it suggested that something could be done, and thus kept alive the idea that a better future was possible. As such, it provided a sense of purpose, in the way of doing whatever it takes. So, as my interlocutors discussed suspicious incidents, they swiftly veered to the question of what to do. When Soraya shared her concerns about her son Mohamed, she received several suggestions as to how her son could address the situation, such as changing his name on his CV to 'Dutch' name or applying to Muslim businesses only. Similarly, when Ghada shared her concerns about her daughter Yasmin, she was advised to confront her daughter's teacher.

The tactics and strategies were common practice. As described in the introduction and Chapter Two, my great aunt's Egyptian husband Paul changed his last name to a more Dutch sounding name so that he and his children would look Dutch on paper too. Mirvat named her two sons Ryan and Adam, which are common names in both the Netherlands and Egypt, and intentionally adopted the Dutch ways of writing these names. Mohamed sent his two sons to a publicly funded Islamic primary school, not necessarily because he wanted his children to receive an Islamic education but rather because he felt his sons' teachers would take him more

seriously as a father. Heba sent her daughter and son to an expensive private school for the same reason. In sharp contrast, other parents categorically refused to adopt these strategies and tactics, arguing that changing names or schools was akin to accepting a second rate citizenship.

In addition, parents sought to motivate their children's teachers to get the best out of their children, for example by trying to talk to them on an almost daily basis, while also pushing their children to do just a little bit better than their 'Dutch' peers. I met parents who tried to talk to their children's teachers every day, often to the chagrin of these teachers. Parents were also constantly looking for additional opportunities for their children. They were particularly interested in additional tutoring, which was generally unavailable unless they were able to pay, which most parents were not. I was often asked to tutor children, and if I felt competent enough, I usually did. I had to turn down a mother who asked me to help her seventeen year old son pass his physics exam, and in turn, she asked me to find another tutor for her, saying that she was willing to pay as much as fifty euros per hour, for four hours a week, which I knew was a considerable chunk of her monthly income.

In Chapter Five, I discuss this emotional and affective labor in more depth. Here, I want to point out that almost none of the parents with whom I worked opted to address racism, because they were not sure how the professionals involved in their lives would respond, and worried that, perhaps, it might harm their relations to them, and thus their children (cf. De Koning and Ruijtenberg, 2022) I say almost, because in May 2017, Ibrahim told me he was going to show his sons' teachers that they were not going to get away with racism.

4.5 How (not) to address racism

In May 2017, I received a phone call from Ibrahim, the husband of Safia, one of the women who attended Karima's workshop. Apparently, their son Karim had come home crying after his teacher had called him stupid. I knew they were racist, he said, shouting through the phone. Ibrahim had a biannual ten-minute parent-teacher meeting scheduled a few days later, which he said provided an excellent opportunity to show them that they would not get away with racism. A few days later, I met Ibrahim and his eighteen year old daughter Hager outside school. Ibrahim had dressed up, wearing a suit and a tie. Hager had come to support her father and brother, she said. I know these people, they are all racists, she said, before we entered the school.

As we entered the classroom, Ms. Jacky and her colleague Ms. Suzanne were already sitting behind their desk. Ms. Suzanne welcomed Ibrahim, telling him that they had missed Karim and hoped that he would return soon. Without wasting much time, Ms. Suzanne moved on

to discuss Karim's latest results, represented in clear-cut, colorful graphs. Karim had improved a little, but not enough to catch up. This was especially disappointing because they had gone out of their way to help Karim, Ms. Suzanne asserted. "We are running out of options here", she said, "so we really hope you will reconsider those tests we talked about before. We believe that this is what is best for Karim. If we run some tests, we know how to help him." "*Taany*" (again), Ibrahim sighed in Arabic, clearly tired of this test that they insisted on and that he had refused to give his consent to several times already.

Then, just before Ibrahim could answer, the school's care-coordinator entered the classroom. Ibrahim had asked her to join in, to lend the meeting some extra weight. "So, what did you want to discuss, sir?" she asked as she sat down. Ibrahim looked at Hager, who nodded reassuringly. Looking down, Ibrahim professed that his son had complained about Ms Jacky. Karim's teachers seemed perplexed, as did the school's care coordinator. Then, after just a second of silence, the care coordinator announced that this was something between Ibrahim and Ms. Jacky, and swiftly left.

As the care-coordinator left the room, Ms. Jacky started her defense: "I really do not know where this is coming from. Sometimes I am strict with him, but he needs that." Hager nodded, commenting that Karim indeed was difficult (*lastig*). But Ibrahim would not let it go: "Okay, but why did you tell him he is stupid and has to re-sit the year," he countered. For a moment, Ms. Jacky seemed taken aback, but her colleague, Ms. Suzanne immediately backed her up, telling Ibrahim that Ms. Jacky was an excellent teacher and she could not imagine her saying something like that to a student.

Quickly moving forward, Ms. Suzanne repeated that they had done everything within their capacity to help Karim, taking the opportunity to mention running a test again. "I understand it is scary, but it is really in his best interest," she assured Ibrahim. Ibrahim once again promised to consider the test, and in an apparent attempt to demonstrate his good intentions, asked if there was anything else he or his wife could do. Ms. Suzanne replied that Karim would really benefit from reading on a daily basis. Visibly relieved, Ibrahim promised that he would personally make sure that Hager would read with her brother, before getting up to shake hands and leave.

Ibrahim and Hager had come in all riled up, but over the course of ten minutes, Ibrahim toned down his rhetoric, from accusing them of racism, to accusing one of them from calling his son stupid and saying that he would have to repeat the year. Still, of all the parents I worked with, he took the most antagonistic approach towards his son's teachers, and they were duly taken aback. However, as soon as they regrouped, they resorted to the language of professional expertise and ethics, while also validating Ibrahim's concerns. In turn, Hager and Ibrahim be-

gan to agree with Karim's teachers. As they continued to express concern at Karim's school results, Hager confirmed that Karim was a difficult child, and Ibrahim said that he would reconsider the test and make Hager read with Karim. For a moment, they seemed to agree, even though they only agreed on the symptoms, not the cause or solution of the problem.

After the meeting, Hager scolded Ibrahim for upsetting Karim's teachers, but Ibrahim was unimpressed. After she stormed off, he said his daughter just felt she knew better because she was born in the Netherlands but she should not forget that he had over twenty years of experience with Dutch ways and knew exactly what he was doing. He knew he could not call them racist to their face, but from their initial silence, he knew his meaning had come across. He seemed to have warmed up a little to Ms. Jacky and Ms. Suzanne, too. He said that Karim was indeed "active" (*actief*) and "not-easy" (*niet makkelijk*), and would be difficult to handle for any teacher. If Ms. Jacky had called him stupid, then that was certainly wrong of her, but it did not make her a bad teacher, he said, at once casting doubt on the incident that had him so riled up in the first place and suggesting that Karim was in good hands after all.

Maybe, Ibrahim had been less certain than he made it seem. If Dutch raceless racism instilled a sense of doubt among parents, then Ibrahim's initial resoluteness may be read as a way to resolve his doubts through action. Or maybe Ibrahim was more ready to be convinced otherwise than he made it seem. If parents narrate migration as a sacrifice for their children, then Ibrahim's readiness to be convinced that his son was in good hands may indicate a certain eagerness to hang on to the idea that his son was heading towards a good or at least better future.

That said, Ibrahim and his wife Safia left open the idea that Karim was in the wrong hands, and in the weeks that followed, he continued to delay consenting to the test, while looking for a new school for Karim. This was also a common strategy: appearing agreeable during the meetings, while refusing to consent to a particular test in order to carve out an alternative pathway of action. In some cases, this worked, but in the case of Safia and Ibrahim, it unfortunately did not. As they went to inquire about the possibility to change schools, Ibrahim and Safia were told that although schools have an obligation to accept pupils if they have space, they were allowed to keep the number of children with special needs to four per class, and since this included children with ADHD and dyslexia, in most cases, schools could thus keep out difficult children. They were never sure whether this was true, and neither was I, but it actually did discourage them from further looking for a school. Instead, they tried to make Hager read with Karim, but she refused, saying that he was impossible to keep calm. After the summer, it appeared that Karim was even further lagging behind, and Ibrahim and Safia could no longer hold off consenting to the test.

To Ibrahim's and Safia's relief, but also disappointment, the test did not reveal any specific needs, leaving him relatively unmarked, but also leaving open the option that his poor results and behavior were due to school, making Ibrahim and Safia feel like they should have done more to find another school for Karim. His teachers still insisted that they could not maintain him in class, and despite the results, Karim was sent to a school for children with special needs. Ibrahim and Safia considered sending him to Egypt, to go stay with his grandparents and attend a private international school, but as far as I know, they never proceeded to do so.

4.6 Removing children

In the Netherlands, as elsewhere, child protection services may remove children from their homes in order to protect them from their parents. In practice, this does not happen often. Still, everyone I met seemed to know of a few cases, and if their own children seemed to be going down the wrong path, the specter of an out-of-home placement came to haunt all their interactions with state actors. In fact, in my reading, this was the main reason why many parents were reluctant to share the more thorny challenges of raising children on limited means, and especially instances of domestic violence.

The people with whom I worked also had the option of sending their children to live with family and go to an (international) school in Egypt, as Ibrahim and Safia were considering. In fact, many of the parents whose children appeared to go down the wrong path told me they were contemplating this, and as I mentioned in the introduction, I worked with one mother who actually did send her son to stay with her brother. These parents were following in the footsteps of a generation of Egyptian parents before them, who had also sent their children to Egypt, raising concerns among Dutch politicians and professionals.

In September 2008, the Amsterdam based newspaper *Het Parool* published an investigative piece on "missing" Egyptian school children from Amsterdam ("*Egyptische jongens van basisscholen zoek*[1]"). According to the piece, at least fifteen Egyptian children of two Islamic primary schools in Amsterdam had not returned after the summer holidays. Instead, their parents had left them with their grandparents in Egypt to attend Egyptian schools. Dutch school attendance officers cited by *Het Parool* came up with a number of explanations. Perhaps these Egyptian parents did not want their children to attend mixed-gender schools or be exposed to the progressive Dutch curricula. Or they sought to avoid the Moroccan parents and Moroccan children who dominate Amsterdam's Islamic institutional infrastructure, including Amsterdam's

[1] https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/egyptische-jongens-van-basisscholen-zoek~b4e8ef25/

Islamic schools. Or Egyptian parents might aim to protect their children from the unsafe space that they apparently perceive Amsterdam to be. Either way, it is commonplace for Egyptian children to be raised by their grandparents, as the Dutch school attendance officer apparently knew.

The case of disappearing Egyptian school children from Amsterdam was quickly brought to the attention of local and national politicians. Fouad Sidali, alderman for education in Amsterdam where the two Islamic schools were located, knew about some school children who had returned. In his interview with *Het Parool*, he cited the example of a boy who had been behind in school when he left Amsterdam, but after attending one of Cairo's private international schools, had managed to get into a Dutch university. Nevertheless, Sidali was alarmed. "They develop a language deficit. And when they return to the Netherlands, their integration process has to start all over again. I believe that if you live in the Netherlands, you should live here with your children"[2], he said. State Secretary of Education Sharon Dijksma was similarly concerned. "As soon as parents withdraw their children from Dutch society, they [the children] miss out on the opportunity to get rooted here. It is a wrong signal, anyway. What does this mean for their integration and their image of Dutch society? They are at a vulnerable age, when you make Dutch friends and when you gradually start thinking about what you want to become in the future. This is where they are confronted with issues that are normal in the Netherlands"[3].

Acting on her concern, Dijksma instigated a formal investigation to get to the bottom of things. According to that study, which was completed in April 2009, some 300 Egyptian children from Amsterdam were attending school in Egypt in the 2008-2009 school year, a significant proportion of the 1200 children from Amsterdam who attend school outside the Netherlands. Most of the 300 Egyptian children were boys, and about half of them went to Egypt before the age of four, and had thus never attended school in the Netherlands. The study also revealed that most of the children eventually return to Amsterdam for educational purposes, just as the boy mentioned by Fouad Sidali had done.

Commenting on the outcome of her investigation, Dijksma declared that Egyptian parents in the Netherlands have a right to send their children to school in Egypt but emphasized that

[2] My translation of: "Ze bouwen een taalachterstand op. En bij terugkeer begint het integratieproces van voren af aan. Ik vind: als je in Nederland woont, woon je hier ook met je kinderen"

[3] My translation of: "Zodra deze ouders hun kinderen aan de Nederlandse samenleving onttrekken, lopen die de kans mis hier te wortelen. Het is hoe dan ook een verkeerd signaal. Wat betekent dit voor hun integratie en hun beeld van de Nederlandse samenleving? Ze zijn op een kwetsbare leeftijd, waarop je Nederlandse vrienden krijgt en langzamerhand bedenkt wat je later wilt worden. Hier worden ze geconfronteerd met zaken die in Nederland gewoon zijn."

she considered the practice "undesirable for society" (*maatschappelijk ongewenst*) because the returning children would come to face a language deficiency (*taalachterstand*) and would find it difficult to (re)connect to Dutch society (*aansluitingsproblemen*). Therefore, she and Amsterdam alderman Lodewijk Ascher were exploring avenues to discourage Egyptian parents from sending their children to Egypt, for example by checking if these parents were actually entitled to child support benefits for children living abroad.

In response to the report filed by Dijksma, *the NRC*, a leading newspaper in the Netherlands, went to talk to Egyptian parents who had actually returned to Egypt with their children. In the interviews, summarized in English in an article published online in November 2009[4], the Netherlands appears as a hostile place, where Egyptian parents' lack the freedom to raise their children according to their own standards. As Adel, a father of four who returned to Egypt after he lost his shawarma business, put it: "In the Netherlands you are not allowed to raise your children in the way you should". Mohamed, another father of four, is more specific when he explains their decision to return to Egypt: "We wanted to be able to step in, forcefully if necessary, but you can't do that in the Netherlands. How can you control your children if you're not even allowed to slap them? My nightmare is to see my 16-year old daughter walk in the door with a boyfriend and not being able to do anything about it". Egyptian parents, and especially fathers, felt haunted by the Dutch authorities. Adel: "If your name is Ahmed or Abdullah, appearances are against you. All it takes is a rumor to have the police or child services knock on your door." Aisha, a Dutch convert, similarly points to Islamophobia to explain her decision to move to Egypt with her husband and children: "We Muslims no longer felt at home in the Netherlands. The last straw was when my neighbors called the police because they said I was abusing my children. At least now my daughter is no longer bullied when she goes to school wearing a headscarf. When I go to the parents' meeting veiled I am respected." Mahmoud, who sent his two youngest children to school in Egypt, takes on a more general racism in Dutch schools: "Children from an immigrant background are almost always directed towards vocational education, even if they do well". When his children finish school, Mahmoud expects them to go to university in Europe or the US.

The pieces by *Het Parool* and the *NRC* evoke static notions of 'culture' and 'religion' as fixed in time and place in order to explain why some Egyptian parents sent their children to grow up in Egypt. Dutch professionals appear to impose their norms and values on migrant parents and their children, for example through the supposedly progressive Dutch curricula or

[4]http://vorige.nrc.nl//international/article2404708.ece/egyptian_parents_dont_want_to_raise_their_children_in_the_netherlands

by criminalizing corporal punishment. Likewise, the attempts by State Secretary Dijksma and Alderman Ascher to discourage parents from sending their children abroad appear as attempts to keep the children 'Dutch'. These attempts, as well as their commentary, also illustrate the moralization (van Houdt and Schinkel 2010) and culturalization of citizenship (Duyvendak et al 2016). In turn, the Egyptian parents cited by the *NRC* appear to reject those norms and values, and leave for Egypt to raise their children where they apparently enjoy the freedom to be the kind of parents they want to be and raise their children the way they want.

Fouad Sidali, cited by *Het Parool*, and some of the parents cited by the *NRC* do bring up Islamophobia and discrimination in the Dutch education system as a reason for parents to leave the Netherlands, but Sidali is quick to mention that the practice nevertheless disturbs him, while the *NRC* merely presents the parents' views without backing them up with the wealth of statistics on discrimination in the Netherlands. Class, or socio-economic circumstances, is only mentioned once, in the case of Adel, who left the Netherlands after he lost his shawarma business, but only as a prelude to discuss the clash of cultures.

In the fall of 2016, I went to Cairo to conduct interviews with Egyptian mothers and their now adult children who had decided to return from the Netherlands to Egypt. The people I met there also mentioned 'culture' and 'religion' to explain why they left, but socio-economic conditions appeared just as pertinent, as did strained family relations. Indeed, while the mothers I talked to mentioned that they did not like who their children were becoming, and feared that they would try drugs and alcohol or give in to other temptations, they also said that their husbands' Dutch incomes provided for a middle-class lifestyle in Egypt that was simply incomparable to the kinds of lives they would have lived in the Netherlands. Moreover, at the time, a Dutch income still sufficed to pay for a private education in Cairo, giving their children access to high quality education, which would give them access to good universities across the world, not just in the Netherlands.

I have not found any evidence for a relation between this curious case and what happened in the years that followed, but soon after, the Dutch government began to invest in policies aimed at countering what it called "child-abductions" and "abandonment" (Mol and Kruger, 2018). This included a new law stipulating that children over twelve years old may legally decide with whom they wish to live post separation, increased means of investigation for the relevant officers, as well as workshops for teachers and other frontline professionals on recognizing the signs of 'abduction' or 'abandonment'[5]. Still, by working with Amira, who eventually sent her fourteen year old son to Egypt, I found that these teachers and frontline workers were not always opposed

[5] https://kinderontvoering.org/

to the idea of sending a child to another country in order to get them on the right path again.

4.7 Amira and Ahmed

I became acquainted with Amira in January 2017, when one of the directors I worked with arranged our introduction, so that she could ask me to accompany her to a meeting with her son Ahmed's mentor and the school's so-called care coordinator (*zorgcoordinator*) the next day. It was the very first week of my fieldwork, and she was the first person who asked me to join her to a meeting like that, so I eagerly agreed. The next morning, on our way to school, Amira began to fill me in on the situation. Apparently, Ahmed had been suspended for a week for throwing a snowball with a stone in it at one of his classmates and, per school policy, Amira and Ahmed had to come in to discuss the incident before Ahmed could return to school. This was the umpteenth time that Ahmed had been suspended, so these meetings were routine for Amira, except this time, the school's care coordinator had urged Amira to reconsider the so-called *uitzoektraject* that she had suggested before, because she no longer thought that maintaining Ahmed at school was feasible, as she put it in her e-mail.

As I later learned, this *uitzoektraject* was an eight week program at a school for children with special behavioral and cognitive needs, designed to identify student's needs and potential, and to decide on the next step in their educational career. Amira had refused to consent to the program before, out of fear that the other children in the program would negatively impact Ahmed's behavior, and more generally, that the program would impede his future opportunities. She had instead tried to enroll Ahmed in psycho-social care through Mounir, their so-called Parent and Child Advisor, who was charged with identifying the family's needs, coordinate between the different care providers, monitor progress, and had a duty to report if a child was in danger. However, Mounir had refused to refer Ahmed, and since Ahmed's teachers continued to suspend him, she understood that she had no choice but to consent to the program, and she had already indicated that in her reply e-mail the day before.

In the year that followed, Ahmed kept on getting in trouble, or making it, depending on whom you would ask, each time triggering more and more invasive welfare interventions. Two weeks after he enrolled in the exploratory program, the program's care coordinator called a meeting with Ahmed, both his parents, and their Parent and Child Advisor. After we had all found a seat, she announced that they would enroll Ahmed in psycho-social care as soon as possible, but that with the way things were looking, they would have no choice but to send Ahmed to School2Care, a school for children with serious problems at home, at school, and in their free

time. And if that did not work out, they would have to consider De Koppeling, a closed youth facility. You really want to avoid that, she told Ahmed.

Afterwards, outside, we were all a little overwhelmed. Amira said she was happy that Ahmed would finally enroll in psycho-social care, but seemed more preoccupied with the prospect of School2Care and especially De Koppeling, because even though she did not know these organizations, from the way the care coordinator had talked about them, she knew they were organizations to be feared. If they take him to prison, we have to take him to Egypt, she said, ostensibly to Mounir, their parent and child advisor, but probably more so to Ahmed's father, Salah, who actually lived in Egypt, and who was visiting the Netherlands for medical reasons. Salah said that he had been saying that forever, and maybe he had, but from the look on Amira's face, it seemed like it was new to her, and it certainly was for me. "Well, take him then," Amira countered. "I will, if I can," Salah said, before turning to Mounir to ask if he could. Mounir nervously explained that, since Ahmed was above twelve years old, he would have to agree. "He won't", Amira announced, before storming off, pulling me with her. As we walked away, Amira told me that she knew for a fact that Ahmed would go to School2Care and then to De Koppeling.

Amira was right: in April, the school's care coordinator announced that they would refer him to School2Care. In the weeks that followed, Amira and Salah focused on preparing Ahmed's move. They talked to family members, arranged a school, and when all else was said and done, bought tickets for the first day of the summer holidays. I asked Amira what they would tell Ahmed, and she said they would tell him he was going on a holiday. As it turned out, Ahmed was over the moon at the prospect of going to the country in which he was born, and where people still wanted him, as he put it.

In June, a good week before the start of the summer holiday, Salah and Ahmed travelled to Egypt. In Egypt, it turned out that, unbeknown to Amira and Ahmed, Salah had married again. His wife apparently had not known about Ahmed either, and actually did not want him in her life. After the first night, Salah dropped him at Amira's brother, who was happy to have him, for the holidays. Amira unsuccessfully tried to persuade her brother to keep Ahmed longer, but by August, she saw no other option than to ask Salah to take Ahmed to Amsterdam, which Salah happily did.

Back in the Netherlands, Ahmed only sporadically went to School2Care. As already described in the Introduction, he instead began to spend his nights out on the street, sometimes returning only early in the morning. If he was at home, he was often aggressive and sometimes even pushed or hit Amira and his younger brothers. On multiple occasions, Amira found large quantities of drugs along with lists of phone numbers, leading her to believe that he was dealing

drugs again. She also found a crowbar, as well as a balaclava, which he claimed were not his.

In the spring of 2018, after many conversations, Amira and Salah agreed that Ahmed could no longer live at Amira's place. Initially, they agreed for Salah to move back to the Netherlands, where he still rented a place, and to take Ahmed in. However, realizing that he was serious, Salah's new wife, who was going to stay in Egypt, reluctantly agreed to take Ahmed in. Amira preferred this option anyway, as it would take Ahmed away from the streets of Amsterdam. Ahmed too agreed, saying that he belonged in Egypt, among people who did not see him as second rate. Amira nevertheless wanted to be sure that she would not get into trouble for it, so she decided to consult Mounir and the child protection officer. To my surprise, they were all open to the idea, and actually came over to Amira's place to meet Salah and ask him questions regarding the living and schooling arrangements. Salah dutifully answered all their questions, and when everyone seemed satisfied, they booked the tickets. Ahmed said he was happy, saying that he was looking forward to a break from everything that was going on in the Netherlands.

Initially, I was surprised that these professionals let Ahmed go to Egypt, but after talking to them later on, when the dust had settled, I understood that they did not think a closed youth facility was a good solution either, not for Ahmed, but definitely not for Dutch society either. They emphasized that troubled youth going into these facilities often came out even more troubled, and that spending some time in another context might not be such a bad idea after all.

4.8 Conclusion: Different but Equal

In this chapter, I explored parenthood as arena in which parents and state-actors negotiate what it means to be different but equal. As parents, the people with whom I worked related to a whole range of organizations and professionals that were new to them. Initially, they projected their hopes onto these organizations and professionals, because even if migration had not brought about the future to which they had once aspired, migration could still be a sacrifice for their children's benefits. However, as their children grew older, my interlocutors became less certain. In addition to fearing that their children could be morally corrupted by Dutch culture, the parents with whom I worked also feared that instead of benefitting their children, the Dutch education system and its representatives would actually work to marginalize their children. At the same time, they were reluctant to adopt racism as an absolute or all-encompassing explanation for how their and their children's lives unfolded in the Netherlands, not necessarily because they wanted to downplay how racism impacts the lives of non-white people in the Netherlands, but rather because to adopt racism as an absolute, all-encompassing explanation was to admit that

their hardship was not a sacrifice, but just that, hardship. Instead, my interlocutors maintained that their children should and could benefit from the Dutch education system and labor markets, and instead mostly asked the question of what to do to keep them on the right trajectory. This kept alive the possibility of a better a future, as well as their sense of purpose in life, but in a way, it also put the onus of children's marginalization on themselves, and stopped a more consistent critical examination of racialization in the Netherlands.

Answering this question of what to do in practice, the people with whom I worked tried to differentiate between better and worse organizations and professionals. Subsequently, they adopted various strategies and tactics to attract the better ones and avoid the worse ones, and to encourage the professionals involved in their children's lives to treat their children as best as they could, or at least as they should. This was relatively easy when their children appeared to be doing well, and as long as that was the case, the work of maintaining good relations with their children's teachers squarely fell on the shoulder of mothers, who found it easier to develop and maintain close relations with professionals, the majority of whom were women too. However, when their children were struggling, as children invariably do at some point, fathers were put forward to show teachers that they would stand their ground. This strategy appeared to have limited effect, in that sense that they often ended up giving consent to the interventions they were trying to prevent. For the parents with whom I worked, out of all the harmful state interventions, the potential of removing children from their parents was the worst. In turn, most of the parents with whom I worked had the option of removing their children from the Netherlands, and outside of the purview of Dutch institutions and professionals.

In Dutch policies, the children of migrant parents are portrayed as trapped in between the parallel worlds of their parents and the society in which they are growing up. Instead, I found that the parents with whom I worked felt caught between the conflicting desires to pinpoint racism and to believe that a better future was still possible. In between these opposing desires, the parents with whom I worked sought to carve out a space in which difference would not automatically mean unequal opportunities, but new opportunities. In the process, they defined the differences between themselves and their children on the one hand, and white Dutch parents and children on the other, but, they could never be sure that their attempts to claim to equal rights were successful.

5

The State, Institutions, and Street-Level Bureaucrats

The state – writ large – enters people's lives through concrete institutions, and the people who represent those institutions. As a result of my offer to help, I worked with people who were deeply embroiled in those institutions and the street-level bureaucrats, or professionals who are in a position to shape policies as they implement them. These included the deportation agency and deportation officers, various social workers, child protection officers, school care-coordinators, and teachers, to name just a few of the street level bureaucrats who have already figured in this dissertation.

Across institutional settings, street-level bureaucrats would say they were there to help. The people whom I accompanied wanted to, and often actually did, believe street-level bureaucrats. Yet, many of the people I knew also experienced street-level bureaucrats as the gatekeepers to desirable services and knew that these institutional actors could push 'solutions' that they themselves saw as the problem, such as deportations, or placing a child in foster care.

In between their desire to believe street-level bureaucrats and the perceived need to convince the latter to provide access to desirable services and desist from unwanted interventions, the

people with whom I worked tried to develop close ties to street-level bureaucrats while also keeping their strategic distance. For their part, the street-level bureaucrats on the other side of the table were also cultivating close ties, for example by asking people about personal affairs that were not of any relevance to the situation at hand. In some cases, this led to close or even friend- or kin-like relationships. Still, that did not prevent disagreements.

When the people whom I accompanied dared to express their doubts about the help on offer, these same street-level bureaucrats would say that they understood where their clients were coming from, before emphasizing that they were convinced that the course of action they proposed was in everyone's best interest. Usually, this prompted the people whom I accompanied to say that they would reconsider. This did not stop them from wondering whether the course of action proposed to them was in their best interest, or in that of the street-level bureaucrat or the institution they represented.

In this chapter, I describe these dynamics in much more ethnographic detail, to show how national agendas get refractured through specific institutions, specific street-level bureaucrats, and specific state-subjects. To do so, I return to some of the people who figured earlier in this dissertation, namely Mahmoud, who left his house after his wife threatened to call the police on him (Chapter Three), Saïed, who was detained for deportation when I met him (Chapter One), and Amira, the divorced mother of three whose fourteen year old son attracted a myriad of youth welfare professionals (Chapters Three and Four). I begin by locating these negotiations at the intersection of the ideal of impersonal authority, and concrete institutions and professionals who embody a politics that is deeply personal.

5.1 Impersonal authority

In his posthumous magnum opus *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Max Weber (1922) promises that bureaucracy brings about impersonal authority – or the situation in which public offices are ruled by law – while warning us that it will become like a *stahlhartes Gehäuse*, or a 'shell as hard as steel[1]', that diminishes individual freedom and eats away at the sense of community, and as such may well be experienced as a polar night of icy darkness.

[1] The most well-known translation of *stahlhartes Gehäuse* is Talcott Parsons' phrase 'iron cage'. Here, I use Baehr's (2002) translation, which, as he explains, better reflects Weber's much more complex understanding of bureaucracy, amongst others because unlike the element iron, steel is human-made, and whereas a cage suggests confinement, a shell suggests the emerging of a new human being.

After *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was translated as *Economy and Society* (1978) and gained prominence, Michael Lipsky (1980) famously showed that so-called street-level bureaucrats are not only ruled by laws and regulations, but also make rules and regulations, through the specific ways in which they implement them. In the meantime, Marxist, feminist, and later critical race theorists developed more fundamental critiques of Max Weber's take (Golman and van Houten, 1977; Ferguson, 1984; Byron and Roscingo, 2019). Their critical work makes it clear that laws and regulations reflect and reproduce power, so that impersonal authority is not rational or fair, but just that, authority. In practice, instead of acting on these more fundamental critiques, policy makers have adopted Michael Lipsky's view and put the onus for irrational and unfair outcomes on inflexible and biased street-level bureaucrats. The solution to this problem has been to continue to "professionalize" street-level bureaucrats (Hall, 1968), and to subject them to more, and more elaborate audits, giving rise to what Marilyn Strathern (2000) has called 'audit cultures'.

In the meantime, street-level bureaucrats have also been tasked with bending the shell as hard as steel, or, more concretely, with customizing generic, one-size fits all provisions to fit local and personal needs (Rose, 1996; Vollebergh, de Koning, and Marchesi, 2021). In the Netherlands, welfare workers are now supposed to maintain close relationships with their target groups in order to offer tailor-made solutions, which is expected to not only produce a more human centered government, but also reduce costs (Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2018; cf. Tonkens and van Kampen, 2018). Meanwhile, so-called participation officers are supposed to activate people who are apparently not yet participating, or not in the right ways (see Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008, for more on the social construction of participation).

The work that street-level bureaucrats are thus called upon to carry out may undermine the ideal of standardization and impersonal authority. My colleagues Anick Vollebergh, Anouk de Koning, and Milena Marchesi (2021: 750) show how street-level bureaucrats' affective labor indeed engendered confusion about the proper limits to intimacy in the professional contexts as well as rumors about favoritism and unfair treatment. However, as Fenna Smits (2022) demonstrates, in the Netherlands, street-level bureaucrats' affective labor actually evokes intimacy as a standardizing mechanism, while Milena Marchesi (2022) shows that, in Italy, volunteers' affective labor does not dissolve the distinction between the public and private, but rather promises to make the public more intimate, and to bring public values into the private sphere.

Mirroring the emphasis on the work that street-level bureaucrats do, in recent years, anthropologists have drawn attention to the work that citizens do when they engage street-level bureaucrats, as well as the immaterial goods that they produce in the process. In her ethnography

of a government hospital in Papua New Guinea, Alice Street (2012) shows how citizens engage in their own translational work as they try to fit themselves in policy categories in order to be seen by the state. Insa Koch (2019) highlights the affective labor that residents of a council estate in the UK carry out in order to influence the way in which street-level bureaucrats do their work to suggest that, in doing so, they "personalize" the state. Tatjana Thelen and colleagues (2014) interpret the relationship between elderly Serbians and their care-workers as kin-like in order to show the intertwining of kinship and the state (see also Johanssen and Grøn, 2022).

In this chapter, I generally follow their approaches and analyses, but emphasize that making things personal does not negate the impersonal, but rather produces it, by implication. That is, while street-level bureaucrats made personal the state, or at least the specific institution they were working for, and while the people whom I accompanied personified the immigrant, or at least a specific version of the immigrant, their interactions and relations also contribute to the production of the state and the immigrant as impersonal abstractions. To show this, I turn to the three distinct types of encounters between the people with whom I worked and street-level bureaucrats that I observed: encounters animated by attempts to become eligible for 'good' services; encounters animated by attempts to keep away 'bad' services; and encounters that took place after people enrolled in particular services. As I describe these interactions, I emphasize both the intimate relations that emerged and the way boundaries between public and private were enacted, negotiated and contested.

5.2 Accessing services: Mahmoud

In the Netherlands, and across the bureaucratized world, street-level bureaucrats check eligibilities. In some cases, this does not involve any human contact. For example, you may apply for benefits only, and since the tax office already knows your income, you merely have to confirm your identity. In other cases, it does involve human contact. In these latter cases, eligibility checks range from strictly defined check-lists to unpredictable negotiations involving various actors. In the following two sections, I discuss what these different kinds of checks may involve in terms of affective labor. In the next section, I discuss the case of Amira, who tried to make her son eligible for psycho-social care, and once he was signed up, to speed up the waiting list. In this section, I discuss Mahmoud's application for a so-called urgency statement [*urgentieverklaring*] for social housing.

On a sunny Tuesday morning in June 2017, at 11 am, a few weeks after he had been compelled to leave his marital home, Mahmoud was called forward for his "urgency statement advice

interview" [*urgentieverklaring adviesgesprek*]. This was a big moment for Mahmoud. If this interview went well, he would actually get to apply for an urgency statement, which would grant him priority on the waiting list for social housing and would cut his waiting time from up to fifteen years to just several months. He hoped that, after securing housing, child protection services would reinstate his visitation rights. In order to appear pitiful, Mahmoud had clearly dressed down, and as we walked towards the cubicle, I wondered if he had also skipped a night of sleep for the occasion.

The interview was set in a small, closed-off cubicle, and conducted by a woman in her mid-twenties who introduced herself as an intake officer. She began by walking us through the procedure. She explained that she would first ask some questions. Based on Mahmoud's answers, she would advise him whether to apply or not. In the end, it would be Mahmoud's decision, she asserted, but her advice would be part of his application. So what if your advice is negative, Mahmoud asked. Well, in that case I would not advise you to apply, but it's up to you, the officer said. The application fee would be €50 and would not be reimbursed in case of a negative decision, she said, as if to emphasize how much she would advise against it.

Then the interview started. "Where did you live in the last six months?", the intake officer asked. This was a crucial question, because only formal residents of the city are eligible. Mahmoud lived in Amsterdam for nearly twenty years, but after his divorce he briefly registered outside of Amsterdam, and he had only recently re-registered in the city. In an attempt to stay truthful, Mahmoud avoided a direct answer, and instead began to tell the intake officer about his attempts to return to Amsterdam. His approach seemed to work, as the intake officer swiftly moved on to the second crucial question: why did Mahmoud need an urgency statement? Mahmoud was short and to the point: "I need a home to be a father to my children again", he said. "Sir, I need to warn you that the non-resident parent is not eligible for an urgency statement based on the children's needs. Are there any other reasons you need housing urgently, like a medical condition", the intake officer said, in a way that made it seem like she used this phrase often. "Yes, yes, there is!", Mahmoud said, sounding both confused and relieved. He explained that, as a result of a car accident, he suffered from severe pains in his shoulder, back, and legs, and struggled to climb stairs. He had doctor statements to prove his condition, he said. Convinced, the intake officer congratulated Mahmoud, and advised him to apply for a statement based on his medical conditions. "But I cannot guarantee you that they will grant you urgency", she added, as a disclaimer. At 11.10, Mahmoud and I left the cubicle.

Outside, I tentatively inquired about the car accident. As far as I knew, the accident had indeed injured him, but I did not know he was struggling to climb the stairs. "Well, *wat niet*

is kan nog komen", he said in Dutch, conveying that, perhaps, this was still to come, if not in everyday life, than perhaps at least on paper. "Now let me go and find €50", he said, as he walked away. A few weeks later, he told me that his family doctor had refused to provide a statement confirming the condition of his legs, and so he felt like there was no point in applying.

These interviews put interviewers in the position of helping aspiring applicants like Mahmoud by pushing them in the right direction or being lenient, as this particular interviewer did, or to frustrate their attempts. I saw both happen, but the urgency advice interviewers I saw at work were usually quite forthcoming. As such, these interviews seem to undermine the goal of reducing costs, and more generally, the goal of impersonal authority. However, while interviewers may have genuinely wanted help, in this particular case, their leniency was quite inconsequential, as it did not actually make people eligible for an urgency statement, merely to apply for one. Moreover, the interview itself already discouraged aspiring applicants, so interviewers did not necessarily need further discouraging on top of that. A social worker based at a women's shelter once told me she had been instructed to be lenient in order to deflect people's anger, and to let better trained/more senior professionals do the work of saying no. I do not know if that was the case with urgency advice interviewers, but it seems plausible that at least part of their job was to carry out the work of suspicion, while producing a nice atmosphere.

If these interviews put interviewers on the spot of helping or frustrating applicants, then applicants felt it mattered who interviewed them, and how they conducted themselves. This prompted Mahmoud to dress down and to provide the 'right answers', which he knew, but for which he had to stretch the truth a little. He got away with it, not necessarily because he was convincing, but probably because the interviewer wanted to preserve peace, although it could also be that his tactic of trying to come across as especially deserving had actually worked. Mahmoud at least appeared to feel good about himself as we left the interview, even as he was still angry at Hollanda for leaving him out on the street like that.

I do not know how the interviewer felt after the interview. I suspect that, on the one hand, the interview made her feel good, because she had been able to help someone and/or because she had been able to defuse someone who was desperate enough to start a scene. However, I also imagine that conducting interview after interview like that must make interviewers suspicious of applicants, precisely because it puts interviewees in the position of trying to prove their eligibility. In this case, Mahmoud was vague about being registered in Amsterdam, and overemphasized the pain in his legs, and the interviewer must have been aware of that. If that happens time and again, it may be hard to approach each new interviewee open-minded.

In sum, then, eligibility criteria make it such that applicants need to prove their eligibility,

while interviewees get to tell applicants that, if it were up to them, they would grant a particular service. This created interactions that were, at least discursively, marked by understanding, and in the moment, applicants not only felt like they were making a genuine human connection, but also like they had met someone who had truly tried to help. However, as they walked away, they still distrusted Hollanda. Meanwhile, I suspect that eligibility checking street-level bureaucrats walked away suspecting applicants of bending the truth.

In these instances, then, street-level bureaucrats were able to distinguish themselves from the institutions they represent, while the institutions they represent come to overlap with the municipality, or even the state in general.

5.3 Accessing services: Amira

As I described in Chapter Four, a few hours before I first met her, Amira wrote an e-mail to let her son Ahmed's school care-coordinator know that she would consent to the so-called exploratory program (*uitzoektraject*). The care-coordinator had been pushing for this intervention for a while, but Amira had tried to resist in favor of getting Ahmed enrolled in psycho-social care, which she hoped would discipline him. She had discussed this with Mounir, the Parent-and-Child Advisor assigned to their case, who was responsible for identifying Amira's and Ahmed's care needs, link them to relevant care providers, and coordinate between different care providers involved. However, Mounir had insisted that there was no point in forcing Ahmed into psycho-social care if he did not want to enroll, and instead had signed Ahmed up for kick-boxing. In the meantime, Ahmed had continued to get suspended, until Amira realized she did not have much of a choice but to consent to the exploratory program. To her dismay, when she did consent, she found out that, actually, there was a six to eight week waiting list for the exploratory program. In the meantime, Ahmed was supposed to go to the school that he felt had pushed him out, which Amira rightfully predicted he would not.

In the weeks of waiting that followed, Amira continued her efforts to get Ahmed into psycho-social care. Her efforts centered on Ahmed, as well as Mounir, who proved to be hard to track down. The few times that he did pick up the phone, he told her to be patient, even after Amira admitted that Ahmed was not going to school and only attended kickboxing once, which she had hitherto kept to herself out of fear of getting fined by the school attendance officer or having to pay back the kickboxing fees.

Then, on an ordinary afternoon, Ahmed hit his five year old brother in the face with his fist after he had accidentally pushed the shut-down button on the PlayStation in the middle of a

game. Ahmed otherwise adored his brother, and the fact that he was able to do this shocked him, so much so that he agreed to see their family doctor the next day, to talk about his angry outbursts and the possibility of enrolling in psycho-social care. The next day, I met Amira in front of the doctor's office, but Ahmed was nowhere to be seen. When I asked her where Ahmed was, Amira shrugged and said that he had changed his mind and was probably playing PlayStation at home. A few minutes later, in the relative privacy offered by speaking in Arabic in the Netherlands, Amira confessed that, sometimes, she wished child protection services would come and take Ahmed away, for the sake of her two other sons. What kind of mother feels this, she asked. Then, as the doctor called us in, she asked me not to mention what had happened, to avoid child protection services from interfering. As expected, their doctor said that she could not refer Ahmed to psycho-social care without seeing him, and instead offered to enroll Amira. Wouldn't it be nice to talk to someone about everything that was going on. Amira gracefully declined, saying that she did not have time for all that, and after five minutes, we were outside again.

A few weeks later, Ahmed was finally invited for his intake at the exploratory program, which by then came as a relief to Amira, who was hopeful that some structure would do Ahmed well. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. In his first week, Ahmed got suspended twice, once for skipping his afternoon class and once for refusing to work in class. After another week like that, Mirjam, the program's care coordinator called for an emergency meeting with everyone involved, including Ahmed, Amira, her ex-husband Salah, who was visiting the Netherlands from Egypt, Mounir, Ahmed's mentor, the program director, and, finally, me.

The next day, we squeezed into the school's meeting room. After we all found a spot to sit or stand, Mirjam announced that it was against the program's principle to suspend students, but that Ahmed had left them no choice, as he was preventing the other students from working. She then announced that, in the weeks to come, Ahmed would be on a modified schedule, according to which he would study from home, and come to school half an hour after school was out to discuss his work with his teacher for forty-five minutes. This way, they could establish a relationship of trust, after which Ahmed could return to school. Anticipating Amira's objections, Mirjam said that, given how Ahmed had behaved in class, this was really all that they could offer, adding that, if this did not work, they would have to consider School2Care, which if unsuccessful would lead to De Koppeling, a closed youth facility.

In the meantime, Mirjam wanted to explore why Ahmed was struggling in class so much. Ahmed cleared his throat, and said that, after everything that had happened, he just could not shake the feeling that he would be treated unfairly again, and that he was anyway struggling to

accept authority. As he talked, Mirjam and the other professionals nodded. As he finished, they congratulated him, and Mirjam said that understanding the underlying problem was the first step towards a solution, and then introduced the idea of looking for a training of some sort that could help Ahmed to work on said underlying problems. Amira lit up, and taking the floor for the first time that afternoon, said that this was what she had wanted all along, but that Mounir had so far refused to refer him. Mounir objected, but while trying to explain why he had not referred Ahmed before, also said that maybe the time had come for something like that. In turn, Salah suggested sending Amira to a parenting course to prevent Ahmed's younger brothers from going down the same path, but Amira told him he had no idea what he was talking about, and even Ahmed told him to stay out of it (*bemoei je er niet mee*). The care coordinator backed Amira up as well, saying that Amira had been very cooperative so far, and that if it had not been for her, Ahmed would be struggling a lot more, before concluding that she would call different care providers to check if they had an opening. You are a smart boy, you can still make it, so take this opportunity while you can, she said, addressing Ahmed once again. Yes ma'am, Ahmed said dutifully, before we all got up to leave.

The next day, Mirjam phoned me, saying that she had called Amira to update her, but wanted to update me too in order to make sure that the message had come across. She had called around, but the waiting lists were incredibly long, so she had signed up Ahmed for all the good services that she knew. She listed the names, and recommended me to check in with each organization, to see if an unexpected spot would open up. In the weeks that followed, Amira asked me to do so every few days, but it took us a few months to find a spot.

In Amsterdam, and the Netherlands more generally, children who are referred to specialized schools or welfare and healthcare services invariably enter waiting lists, with waiting times often amounting to several months. Actually, waiting lists have become so ubiquitous that some organizations now employ waiting list managers (*wachtlijstbemiddelaar*), and in the year or so that I worked with Amira, Ahmed was always on one or another waiting list. Amira, and others like her, firmly believed that keeping up pressure could open up spots or at least shorten the waiting list, and some of the street-level bureaucrats they encountered confirmed this belief, as Mirjam did. So, Amira, and other parents with whom I worked asked me to keep on calling the organizations they were on the waiting lists for and their parent and child advisors, who they felt were supposed to support them in their efforts as well. They could have called on their own, but they hoped that someone with my way of speaking would have a greater impact.

Depending on the situation, the Parent and Child Advisors whom I called explained that they were still waiting to see how a previous intervention was working out before they would

scale up, or that they could not make the waiting lists disappear either. The people working for organizations with a waiting list emphasized that they could not speed up the process either. However, when a spot did open up, they often presented the opening as a unique opportunity, saying that people were lucky to get a spot so soon. On the one hand, parents took this to confirm that keeping up pressure had helped, and I often felt it had too. On the other hand, parents suspected that maybe the waiting list had been less long than the people on the other end of the phone had said, and although I do not know whether it was intentional or not, I also observed that presenting the opening as a unique opportunity prevented hesitation and induced gratefulness. Indeed, when Ahmed was finally enrolled in psycho-social care, Amira, who was usually adamant about researching the particular organizations her son was sent to, was just relieved and immediately accepted it. The ability to take action also fueled the distinction between good and bad professionals. Amira saw Mounir as a bad professional because he ignored her phone calls and refused to scale up earlier, but saw Mirjam as a good professional, because she was straightforward and took quick action, and in doing so, ignored that Mounir was not in the position to take quick action, whereas Mirjam was.

Here, the state became personal in that sense that it seemed to parents that it mattered highly who represented the state, not only in terms of the atmosphere, but more concretely, in terms of material outcomes. However, it remained impersonal, in that sense that street level bureaucrats had to weigh the interest of the individuals they were meant to help against their own interests, the interests of their institutions, and perhaps even the public interests. Or, in other words, while someone like Mirjam was positioned to set herself apart from the institution, and the state at large, that she represented, Mounir was less so, despite his employer's assumption that he would be closer to Amira and Ahmed.

In the above two sections, I focused on encounters that were marked by the scarcity of desirable resources. In the next section, I show what happened in the opposite situation, that is, with an abundance of resources that are undesirable, or worse, scary.

5.4 Avoiding services: Saïed

The people I worked with distinguished between good and bad services, and subsequently tried to keep away bad services, while attracting good services. In the next two sections, I explore the affective labor that street-level bureaucrats carried out to compel people to use services they did not want. I suggest that, across vastly different settings, street-level bureaucrats used remarkably similar strategies and language: they told people to think about their future, sold their solution

as in the best interest of everyone, and, when challenged, demanded empathy. In turn, the people I worked with were left to stand their ground or get 'convinced'. Here, I describe the dynamics that ensued in two vastly different institutional settings: the Dutch Repatriation and Departure Services (DT&V) and parent and child institutions.

Saïed arrived at Schiphol in the early summer of 2016, applied for asylum, was rejected, and subsequently moved to an immigration detention center, from where the DT&V was supposed to deport him. According to Dutch law, illegalized immigrants may be detained for deportation as long as the DT&V actively attempts to deport them, but for a maximum of eighteen months. In this case, it took the DT&V fourteen months to conclude that Saïed was undeportable, after which he was finally released (see Chapter One).

After his release, Saïed did everything he could to get his story out there. He said he hoped to cause a public outrage, or at the very least, clear himself of any suspicion. In a context in which attention for immigrant detention and deportation is scarce, he was quite successful, too. He most notably worked together with B. Carrot, who turned Saïed's story into the graphic novel *Alle Dagen Ui*[2] or Days of Onion, a title inspired by the Egyptian expression *youm asal, youm basal*, which translates as 'one day honey, one day onion', or good days and bad days, and signals perseverance. The release of *Alle Dagen Ui* prompted a series of interviews, including by journalists working for major newspapers like *NRC*[3], *De Volkskrant*[4], and *Trouw*[5], as well as Amsterdam-based newspaper *Het Parool*[6]. Since then, he has appeared on several podcast episodes, including an episode of *De Verbranders*, a podcast on the colonial origins and contemporary working of Europe's borders that my colleague and friend Neske Baerwaldt and I produce and host[7].

Saïed tends to share the same anecdotes, often using the exact same phrases and even sentences. In Chapter Three, I described that the divorced men and women I worked with did so too, and drew on the work of Kaveri Qureshi (2018) and others (e.g. Hopper, 1993; Simpson,

[2]https://issuu.com/soulfoodcomics/docs/alle_dagen_ui_-_preview

[3]https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/04/22/niet-weten-waarom-je-vastzit-is-het-allerergste-a3997519

[4]https://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/een-jaar-gevangen-op-schiphol-in-rake-tekeningen b5c5c26b/

[5]https://www.trouw.nl/cultuur-media/vluchteling-saied-al-karim-verbleef-een-jaar-in-een-detentiecentrum-op-schiphol-ik-leefde-continu-in-angst~b65a145f/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F

[6]https://www.parool.nl/ps/graphic-novel-over-egyptische-vluchteling-ik-weet-niet-waarom-ik-werd-opgesloten~b92fdf85/

[7]https://soundcloud.com/de-verbranders/ep-6-inside-immigration-detention-with-saied-al-karim-english

1998) to suggest that telling the same story over and over again is part and parcel of the process through which people establish new relations with themselves, others, and the world they live in. I believe this was true for Saïed as well, who in telling the story in the way he did, established himself as someone who fights unjust systems, as opposed to the other detainees, who he presented as less able to do so, and as opposed to the guards and DT&V officers, whom he presented as playing games in order to break detainees' spirits and protect the system. I will later discuss Saïed's rendition of the affective labor that guards carried out. In this section, I provide Saïed's rendition of the affective labor of DT&V officers, as well as his account of how he responded to them. Here is how he talked about it on the recording that Neske Baerwaldt and I did for *De Verbranders*:

> Very polite people come and sit in front of you. They start talking to you: 'We want to help you, we want to help you and your future, you have no future here, you will not get asylum. You cannot stay here, you cannot stay here at all, you will always be in prison, go back." And when you tell them your story they say, yeah, we understand, but you have to go back. "I would be killed if I go back." "Yea I understand, I believe you, but you have to go back." "Sir, I will be in prison for life or they will torture me." "Yeah yeah I know, but also here you do not have any future, you have nothing here. Do you like it here? Do you like to be in detention? Bad food, bad things, you cannot see your family, you cannot see your children. Go back, we will book a ticket and you have to go back." And you keep saying "no." "Ok, we will force you, you will go back with guards. They will take you in the airplane, and you will go back." And then the conversation ends and they come after two or three weeks, and they repeat the same thing.

> I will never forget this guy from the DT&V. He sat with me every time, and he would say, "Sir, I know, you know, I am from Morocco, I know what happened in Egypt, I know it's very bad, and I know you are also one of the wanted people, but it's not in my hands. If it were in my hands I would release you." And I believed this guy. After that, I found out that the DT&V was the organization that kept me inside. If they write, we cannot deport this guy, release him, they will do it. But he comes and sits in front of me, and looks me in my eyes and says I know and I believe you. And I trusted him and I told him everything. He was acting. I don't know, I feel bad about it.

In keeping with the contemporary ideological emphasis on people's autonomy, the DT&V are directed to aim for so-called "voluntary", rather than "forced returns" (Cleton and Chauvin, 2020). However, in practice, the DT&V only targets illegalized people or people who did not return voluntarily. In fact, as Lieke Wissink (2020; 2021) suggests, the work of the DT&V may be best described as making illegalized people deportable, and part of that work is compelling illegalized people like Saïed to volunteer to leave. To make their case, the DT&V officers working on Saïed's case emphasized that he did not have a future in the Netherlands, and that they were there to help him work out his return to Egypt. This in turn put Saïed in the position to plea for compassion. The DT&V case workers would show compassion by saying that they understood, and even claim that it if it were up to them, they would release Saïed, which as Saïed found out, was a lie, because it was up to them to release Saïed, which would have made his life a lot better. They would then repeat that there was no future for him in the Netherlands, in order to suggest that the only way to get out of the detention center and back to his family was to accept their 'service' to deport him, lest they had to use force. Saïed knew that this threat of force was empty as long as the Egyptian embassy did not issue a so-called laissez-passer, a temporary travel document, but he stayed in detention long enough to know that people are deported by force.

Saïed's rendition of his conversations with DT&V case workers matches that of anthropologist Barak Kalir (2019b) who suggests that case-workers showed compassion and underplayed their discretionary power in order to resolve any ethical tensions they may have felt due to the nature of their work and to reach their target of 'voluntary returns'. Saïed recognized that DT&V officers were playing with people's feelings and emotions to reach their targets, but did not perceive them as ethically tormented:

> They don't care about anything, only "go back". It's like you are talking to a robot who does not have feelings, who does not understand anything, his target or his goal only that, "go back."

Saïed said their strategies often worked too, if only to distinguish himself from those people who fell for them: "Those tricks work with a lot of people. People give up and go back, people give up and go to the embassy and they got the laissez passer." Saïed did not give up. Instead, he withdrew, refusing to dignify their tricks with any emotions. Here is how he described his last meeting with the DT&V, on the day of his release.

> The day that I was released, the DT&V came in the morning and I know, OK, they are going to say stupid things. I go to that office with that stolid face, my face, like no feeling, like ok, what you want to say. Then they start talking. "You

> have been here for a really long time and 'eid is coming. You didn't see your family and you didn't call, but we come with good news." I said: "Ok, what good news." "Yeah, you will be released!" "Ok," I say, "Ok, well, ok." Then the guy says, "Oh, you are not happy?" I said "What happy, what do you want? What happy, why did you keep me for fourteen months, what happy? You want me to be happy? Don't say this word."

Saïed said he stood his ground because that was just who he is. I do not want to undermine his sense of self, but in my reading, there were at least two additional reasons. First and perhaps foremost, he knew that the DT&V case workers could not forcefully deport him unless the Egyptian embassy would issue a laisser-passez, which the Egyptian embassy would not do so unless he would present himself, and that he could refuse to do so, which he accordingly did. Secondly, Saïed actually feared for his life, and knew that, per law, the DT&V would have to release him once they reached the inevitable conclusion that they could not deport him, so although he was miserable, he readily chose a few more months in a Dutch prison over torture and forced disappearance in Egypt.

In addition to the emotional labor that DT&V workers carried out to resolve the ethical tensions they experienced, they also carried out affective labor to induce a 'voluntary return' state of mind in illegalized immigrants. To do so, they professed compassion, and said that they were there to help, while also foreclosing the option of a future in the Netherlands, and threatening to forcefully provide the 'service' of deportation, for their own sake. This left Saïed and others who were on the receiving end of these efforts with the option of giving in or standing their ground. They knew that if they gave in, they would implicitly admit to having falsely applied for asylum, yet if they did not give in, they would be to blame for their own misery, as the DT&V case worker had done what they could to help them work on their future. Saïed decided to stand his ground, because he did not feel like he had any other choice. Others also tried, but were forcefully returned, in some cases to countries where they were not citizens, but which were willing to issue a laisser-passez anyway.

The DT&V case-workers showed compassion, and in turn sought empathy for their dire position. Saïed did not buy it. Instead, he experienced case-workers' emotional labor as robot-like, that is, as part and parcel of their playbook of trying to make people cooperate with their own deportation. To Saïed, these robots were the institution, and the institution was the state. This is not to say that he did not feel that some case workers were nicer than others, but rather, that he did not seem to think that this mattered much for the actual outcome of the situation. In the context of the immigration detention center, the overlap between street-level bureaucrat,

institution, and state writ large may be clear to see. In the next section, I return to the story of Amira and her son Ahmed in order to explore how these dynamics played out in a much less hostile setting.

5.5 Avoiding services: Amira

On the morning after Amira let Ahmed's school's care coordinator know that she would consent to the exploratory program, I joined Amira for a meeting at school to discuss the incident that had led to Ahmed's latest suspension. As we entered the building, Amira was warmly greeted by a woman in her mid-thirties, who immediately said how happy she was that Amira had finally consented to the exploratory trajectory. Then, acting as if she only just then saw me, asked me who I was. When I told her, she returned her attention to Amira to congratulate her on participating in my research, before introducing herself to me as Petra, Ahmed's mentor. In the meantime, Ahmed had joined us without saying a word.

Upstairs, Petra took us to a small office, where two more women in their mid-thirties were already sitting. As we entered, they quickly got up to greet Amira and Ahmed, and then me. As we all sat down, they introduced themselves as Elze, the school's care coordinator, who Amira and Ahmed already knew, and Mirjam, the care coordinator of the exploratory program that Ahmed was going to join. I too introduced myself and handed out information sheets on my research.

After that quick round of introductions, Ahmed's mentor again said how happy they were that Amira had consented to the exploratory program and explained that they had invited the program's care coordinator to not waste any time. "Yeah, yeah, it's for the better", Amira said, quietly, in Dutch, while Ahmed looked at his lap. "We also think so", the care coordinator of the exploratory program said cheerfully, and we all smiled. Taking the cue, Ahmed's mentor proposed to not go over the latest incident but instead talk about the program a little bit more, giving the floor to Mirjam.

Mirjam first addressed Amira. "I understand you were worried", she said, "it's never a good sign if a child needs to go to a program like ours. It means they are not doing well, but it also means that he will be getting the help he needs", she continued, turning her gaze to Ahmed, who was still looking at his lap. "I have not had a chance to look at your file, because you and your mother have to agree to that first, but I hear it's not easy for you here", she said, looking intently at Ahmed, who continued to look at his lap. "You should see this program as an eight-week time-out, during which we will work together on a fresh new start", she continued, apparently

unfazed by Ahmed's lack of response. "Then, in the end, we will see whether it is better for you to stay at our school, in a small class, to return here or to go to another regular school. How does that sound to you?" Looking up now, Ahmed said that it sounded good. The care coordinator said she was glad to hear that, before announcing that, unfortunately, there was still a waiting list for the program, but that hopefully a spot would open soon. Amira nodded. Taking over again, Ahmed's mentor asked Amira and Ahmed to sign a paper to approve the sharing of Ahmed's file, which they both did. She announced that, until a spot opened up, Ahmed was of course still welcome at school, and told Amira not to hesitate to reach out in case she had any further questions. She thanked everyone for joining the meeting, signaling that the meeting had ended.

All in all, the meeting took less than twenty minutes, and I had only managed to translate some of the crucial parts, like the part about the program being eight weeks, the waiting list, and the consent, so on our way back, I asked Amira what she made of it all, and if there was anything she wanted me to clarify. Amira sighed. I do not need to understand everything they say to understand what's going on, she said. They pretend that this is an opportunity, but it is not. This is not a good place and I do not want him to go there, but what can I do, she asked rhetorically, for she clearly did not feel she had a choice.

The encounters between the parents with whom I worked and the actors involved in their children's lives were marked by a discursive emphasis on the child's best interest (see also the case of Ibrahim and his son Karim discussed in Chapter Four). The parents with whom I worked said they wanted what was best for their children, and the teachers and other professionals they encountered said they worked with and for children and their parents. In general terms, the people with whom I worked and the professionals they encountered agreed on what was in the child's best interest. They both saw education as the main way to a meaningful career, and thus a good future, and they both felt that good behavior and school results signified that children were on the right path, while poor behavior and bad school results signified the opposite. That said, if children did not appear to follow that road, parents and professionals rarely agreed on the best way to get children back on track. Parents generally wanted their children's teachers to spend more time with the children, but teachers and the welfare and healthcare professionals involved through schools generally wanted to test children. Parents were unsure about these tests. On the one hand, they wanted to believe professionals who said that testing would help their children. On the other, they feared that the outcome of these tests could stigmatize their children forever, as stupid, or misbehaving.

On paper, consent procedures enabled parents to refuse tests or other measures that they considered harmful. However, as already described in Chapter Four, in practice, refusing to

consent was a difficult step to take. First of all, as street-level bureaucrats presented tests and other solutions in the language of the child's best interest, refusing to consent would brand parents as undermining professional expertise and as refusing what was best for their child. Second, and perhaps most importantly, more often than not, school care coordinators and other welfare workers only offered one solution, so that refusing to consent was akin to foregoing any help. Despite all of this, parents often did refuse to consent, hoping to negotiate a course of action that they saw as more beneficial, or if that proved to be impossible, for the poor behavior or school results to improve. This did annoy street-level bureaucrats, who felt stuck with a problem that they were not able to solve without parents' consent, and so they kept on pressuring parents by appealing to what they called the child's best interests. In my experience, by the time parents consented, they felt defeated, as Amira did, which is to say that they were not quite convinced that the course of action offered to them was a good way forward, but rather, that they had not been able to forge a better one.

Still, invested as they were in their children's futures, the parents I worked with wanted to believe that a course of action was better than no course of action. Amira was no exception. After more than a month of waiting, in April, Mirjam finally confirmed that a spot would open up a week later. In the week that followed, Amira bought Ahmed a new backpack and other school supplies to mark the new start. On the day of the intake, we all met in front of the school: Ahmed and Amira, Ahmed's father Salah, their parent and child advisor Mounir, and I. Inside, Mirjam warmly welcomed us, and then took us on a tour through the school, emphasizing at each stop how well suited the school was for students like Ahmed. At the end of the tour, we stopped for a quick chat with the program director, who warmly welcomed us all, repeating that the program was designed as a time out during which students could work towards a fresh new start. We then sat down with Ahmed's new teacher and mentor, who emphasized how much experience they had working with students like Ahmed, and said that they were looking forward to work with Ahmed, prompting Mirjam to say that as a care coordinator, she was also looking forward to work more closely with Amira and Salah. They all looked expectantly at Ahmed, who rose to the occasion to explain that he had not been going to his school because he had felt like everyone there was already against him, and assured everyone that he was eager to get started again, earning him compliments from the people at the program, as well as Mounir, who announced that Ahmed was a smart boy who could achieve anything he wanted if he put his mind to it. Amira said that she hoped that things would become better soon and Salah said that he was going to spend a lot of time with Ahmed to ensure they would. Afterwards, I couldn't help but feel a little optimistic too.

In their attempt to convince Amira to accept a service that she did not want, the school's care coordinator resorted to very similar strategies as the DT&V case workers targeting Saïed, and as virtually all the street-level bureaucrats who had to pull people in. In my reading, there are three overlapping characteristics of these strategies. First, by targeting people for their services, street-level bureaucrats enacted some people as 'public problems', such as illegalized residents and undisciplined teenage boys in the cases above. In a way, as they applied for services, the people I worked with also enacted themselves as public problems, and they often did so in overlapping ways. Saïed was trying to resolve his illegalization by appealing the negative decision on his request for asylum. Amira was trying to resolve Ahmed's lack of school-like behavior by pushing Mounir to enroll Ahmed into psycho-social care in order to discipline him. That said, the people I worked with who were not yet convinced of the services on offer felt that the street-level bureaucrats who sold these services did not agree with their diagnosis of the problem. In fact, in these instances, the people I worked with often felt that the service on offer would make the problem worse, or was the problem, as was the case for Saïed, who considered deportation a bigger problem than illegalized stay, and for Amira, who considered a school for children with special needs a bigger problem than poor behavior.

Second, as a result of the above, in these instances, street-level bureaucrats sought to convince their clients of their interpretation of the situation. They did so by establishing the possible courses of action, and subsequently presenting one course of action as in everyone's best interest. In the case of Saïed, the DT&V case workers established that Saïed was going to be deported, and then said that it was in his best interest to cooperate and avoid a forced deportation. In the case of Amira and Ahmed, the school's care coordinator established that they could not maintain Ahmed, and then said that it was best for Ahmed to join the exploratory program rather than stay at home, which given the waiting list turned out to be rather similar options. Saïed and Amira both refused to accept the conditions presented to them by these street-level bureaucrats. Saïed maintained that he was not going to be deported, as he knew that they could not actually forcibly deport him without violating the law. Amira maintained that Ahmed could stay at his school if he received proper psycho-social care. Moreover, both Saïed and Amira ridiculed the idea that the courses of action that were offered to them were in their best interest, pointing out that instead, they were in 'their' best interest, by which they referred both to the individual street-level bureaucrats, the institutions they worked for, and the state writ large. Saïed openly resisted the DT&V workers, but he could do so because he knew that, in the end, they could not forcibly deport him. Amira was more circumspect, but still annoyed the street-level bureaucrats she was dealing with, in part because she caused delay, and in part

because she implicitly challenged their sense of self as professional who knew and wanted what was best for the children they worked with.

Third, if challenged, street-level bureaucrats underplayed their discretionary space, and instead presented their proposed course of action as in everyone's best interest, again and again, while also seeking ways to force people into consenting against their will (which indeed undermined the basic idea of consent). The people I worked with were easily convinced that street-level bureaucrats' hands were tied. Nevertheless, this did not make them believe that the proposed course of action was a good way to go, and so they continued to resist, until street-level bureaucrats found the right stick to force them into the service they were offering. If they did consent, the people I worked with made it seem as if they had accepted the measure, and in a way they had, for even if they still did not consider the proposed course of action as good, given the circumstances in which they were put, they accepted it as the least bad option.

So far, I explored the affective labor involved in negotiating access to state services and preventing unwanted interventions. I showed that, state, institutions, and street-level bureaucrats came to overlap, or appeared to be separate from one another. In the next section, I move on to explore the affective labor involved after enrollment. I continue to do so through the stories of Saïed and Amira, in order to further showcase the blurred boundaries.

5.6 Managing managers: Saïed

Street-level bureaucrats may be charged with managing clients and monitoring their progress. In the case of Saïed, DT&V officers were in charge of monitoring whether he was still making progress, and of proving that he was still deportable, while the guards and ultimately the director of the detention center were in charge of managing his conduct. In turn, Saïed sought to manage the conduct of the guards. In this section, I look closely at how they both did this.

In the early weeks of his detention, Saïed had to see a doctor outside the detention center, and to his dismay, they handcuffed him for the entire time. Afterwards, he went to complain to the people at *Vluchtelingenwerk*, the independent council for refugees, who had an office in the detention center. They told him that the guards were not allowed to handcuff him unless they could prove that he was a flight risk, which he was not. After consulting the immigration detention hotline, he filed a complaint, which was upheld by an internal disputes committee, and eventually settled with 25,- euros for the violation, which the director personally came to hand over. After that, Saïed acquired a copy of the house-rules, and began to hold the guards and the director accountable. He most notably found out that detainees had a right to enter

the courtyard during daylight hours, not just the hour that they were getting, so he demanded the guards to open the door whenever he or someone else wanted to go outside, making a point out of staying out as long as he wanted.

Saïed also made a point out of expanding the possibilities of his life in prison. Growing literally sick of the food, he took the seeds from a tomato and planted them in the courtyard. One of the hateful guards got angry, and told Saïed to stop what he was doing. Saïed, however, appropriated the DT&V discourse, and told her that he was not in prison, that was free to do what he wanted, and subsequently filed a complaint. The director agreed with him, and provided seeds for a garden, which he made that hateful guard give to Saïed.

According to Saïd, before he came, the guards were used to getting their way. He said that this was the first time they were challenged like that, and they did not always know how to respond to it. Some guards respected him for it, but others hated him. He said he could see it on their faces and hear it from the way they talked to each other about him. Going along, Saïed showed hostility to the bad cops, while only telling the good cops what he wanted the director to know, and not about the complaints that he was filing, which he said always came as an unpleasant surprise.

Then, the guards retaliated. Saïed had been calling the guards all morning for painkillers, but they had refused to provide them. Then, suddenly, a huge guard who Saïed had never seen before and who he later found out was part of a special security team came to his cell. He aggressively asked Saïed what his problem was. Saïed said he needed his medicine, but the man pushed him inside his cell, and against the ground. At that moment, another detainee and two regular guards passed by on their way to court. Saïed called out for help, and then the regular guards came. Saïed told them what happened, and shortly after, the director came to hear him out. The director told Saïed that he was making some serious allegations, and that they would check the CCTV, but that they would put him in isolation if it turned out he was lying. An hour later, he was transferred to 24 hours of isolation, according to Saïed because the cameras did not reach into his room, which the guard knew, and which the director also knew. Saïed continued to emphasize that there was a witness, and continued to make his case even after his release.

After that, the director began to treat him differently. One time, he offered Saïed to use his computer to talk to his family. Saïed refused, in part because he did not want special treatment, but also because he feared that it would be a one-time thing, and that, if so, it would only make things harder for his wife and children, whom he tried to protect from what was going on. Later, the director complimented Saïd for the work he was doing, and said that, maybe, if he would

get out and get his papers, he could come and work at the detention center. On his last day in detention, the director came to him once more, Saïed said.

> "He came like, "Oh, you are leaving, congratulations, I am very happy for you. But, those complaints, can you withdraw them?" I said "No, I will not take them back." And when I was released, I signed a paper for Stichting LOS to observe my case."

Detention centers are inherently violent. They deny certain people the right to liberty in the name of the public interest. However, detainees still have rights. They also have duties. The guards are charged with ensuring that detainees' rights are protected and that they fulfill their duties, that is, comply with the rules and regulations. According to Saïed, the guards in the detention center did not care about the detainees, but about their own peace of mind, at the expense of detainees' rights. To protect their peace of mind, the guards allegedly played a classic game of good cop bad cop, in which some guards tried to force and other guards trying to seduce detainees into obedience. The tricks they used induced a wealth of emotions, but not necessarily an obedient state of mind. Quite the opposite, Saïed decided to play them on their own terms, seeking to force them into obeying the rules through complaint procedures, while luring them into obedience through nice initiatives, and friendly talk. In a way, then, Saïed actually did obey rules and regulations, but only the written rules and regulations, not the unwritten ones. This must have induced a wealth of emotions, but it did not quite induce obedience, as indicated by the violent incident with the guard and especially the final incident with the director. In a mirror of Saïed's by-the-book obedience, the guards and the director thus only followed the unwritten rules, or the 'normal' way in which things were done.

Street-level bureaucrats across different settings resorted to using incentives and punishments (carrots and sticks) to push and pull their clients into behaving in a certain way. This put their clients in the position of responding to the sticks and carrots, because it would make them look good, and perhaps give them some leverage vis-à-vis the street-level bureaucrats who enacted the unwritten rules, or some space to resist them, as Saïed did. In the next section, I will return to the case of Amira, to show that, for mothers like her, the effort to create a space for exception involved managing complex relationships with the actors involved in their children's lives. I pick up the story at the moment when Mirjam attempts to enroll Ahmed into psycho-social care.

5.7 Managing managers: Amira

One afternoon in April, Mirjam unexpectedly called me around 2 pm. She explained that she had gone ahead and was signing Ahmed up for psycho-social counseling, but as part of the registration, his mother had to complete a rather long questionnaire about the situation at home. She had called Amira to suggest completing the questions together, but they had struggled to understand each other. She had then called Mounir but he had not picked up his phone, and she did not want to waste too much time, so she had called me to see if I was available, which I was. In fact, I was already on my way to Amira's because she had found a large quantity of pills in Ahmed's stuff, which she believed were drugs, and wanted to talk to me about what to do.

Half an hour later, Mirjam arrived with cookies and flowers, to brighten things up a bit, she said. Amira thanked her extensively for the cookies and the flowers, but also for moving so quickly. "Oh, I am just doing my job," Mirjam said as she was taking off her shoes. Standing in her socks, she began to admire Amira's place. Amira blushed and ushered Mirjam over to the couch where I was already sitting. Mirjam sat down, pulled her legs underneath herself, and accepted the cup of tea that Amira offered with two hands. She tentatively pulled out the questionnaire, which looked rather hefty, but said that, before anything else, she just wanted to check in with Amira, to see how she was doing in these difficult times.

Amira was not doing well. The night before, she had once again found drugs among Ahmed's stuff, convincing her that he would end up in a closed youth facility. I had suggested calling Mounir to get a better sense of her options, but Amira had said that she did not want to stir anything up yet. So, I was surprised when Amira said that, actually, she was not doing well, and that the worries about Ahmed were slowly killing her (her words, which I translated for Mirjam). She began to cry, uttering apologies, but Mirjam came over to her side of the couch, and held Amira tightly. Amira leaned in, and cried for a good few minutes. Afterwards, she thanked Mirjam, said she had not been held like that in a long while. Mirjam said that she could always call if she needed to cry, and then suggested to leave the questionnaire for another time and to go on a walk instead. By then, I was not translating anymore, and sensing the mood in the room, I suggested that I could come back the next day to fill in the questionnaire with Amira, and left.

The next day, I went over to fill in the questionnaire, which took us about two hours. In the meantime, we were talking about the drugs that Amira had found. She had suspected that he was dealing in drugs for a while, and now that she knew for sure, she was very seriously considering sending Ahmed to Egypt. In fact, she had already asked his father if he could take him, and he was already looking into tickets. I asked her what they would tell Ahmed, and she

said they would tell him he was going on a holiday, because otherwise he would refuse to go. I was not surprised. I knew that this happened, and given the way things were going, I too felt a sense of urgency. I said something along those lines, and to my surprise, Amira said that Mirjam had said the same during their walk. Apparently, Amira had felt comfortable enough to confide in her. I asked Amira what had made her decide to tell Mirjam. She said she did not know, but that she felt like Mirjam understood the situation better than she herself did, and would not be afraid to act, which I interpreted as a rebuke of Mounir.

In her position as the care coordinator of the exploratory program, Mirjam was meant to make sure that, after the program ended, they would know what the best pathway for Ahmed would be. She knew that in order to do so, she had to cooperate closely with Amira, who would have to give her consent for the more specialized tests, and, perhaps even more importantly, had to make sure that Ahmed would show up. So, when she showed up with flowers and cookies, and took Amira on a walk to talk about how she was doing, she was probably indeed doing her job, as she said she was. In contrast to her more threatening announcement of the day before, when she said that Ahmed would be on that customized schedule, and could end up in a closed youth facility, this was the part of her job where she got to play the good cop. I do not know whether Amira would share this analysis, but, even if she did, she would probably say that for her, both the sticks and carrots were important. Indeed, although she did not always like what Mirjam had to say, she liked her clarity, and she hoped that it duly impressed Ahmed. So, as far as street-level bureaucrats went, Mirjam presented a good one, if not the best.

Mounir, on the other hand, represented a bad professional, if not the worst. "There is no point with this man", Amira often said. For her, it did not help that he was Moroccan. For starters, she did not quite understand his Moroccan Arabic, and the few times that we all met, I actually translated between his Dutch and her Egyptian Arabic. More importantly, however, she felt that as an Arab man, he judged her for divorcing her husband, a feeling that was fueled by the fact that Mounir made a point to involve Ahmed's father Salah in all decisions, even though Salah was in Egypt and not involved in Ahmed's everyday upbringing. Later, I talked to Mounir about these dynamics, and he told me that his manager often asked him to take on Arab families, because she felt that he as a Moroccan man could achieve more. He usually agreed, not because he agreed with her reasoning, but because he did not always want to waste his time and energy on challenging his manager.

To be fair, Mirjam was much better positioned to be seen as a good professional than Mounir, who was put in a very difficult position by his superiors, and moreover, was already suspect to Amira because he was a Moroccan man. Mirjam had fewer 'clients', and moreover, appeared

to have the energy to enthusiastically carry out her work, whereas Mounir was dealing with an unruly teenage boy himself, as well as the untimely passing of his brother, reflecting his class and racialized position in the Netherlands. Still, no matter how 'good' she was, Mirjam could not prevent Ahmed from sliding down a slippery slope any more than Mounir could, and actually very explicitly put the interests of her institution over Ahmed's interests by not allowing him to attend regular classes. Amira saw all of this, and I do not think she felt that Mirjam made a real difference for Ahmed. Still, Mirjam clearly made a difference for her, and I think it was because Mirjam made her feel that she was not alone, and that Ahmed's troubles were ultimately public, in that sense that the state, through people like Mirjam, had a duty to care. Indeed, even if she would end up referring Ahmed to School2Care, thus turning Ahmed into their problem, she did not leave Amira to fight for herself as Mounir and actually Ahmed's previous school had. Or, to put it in the terms of this chapter, Mirjam turned the problems that others privatized into public problems again, which made Amira feel like she was not on her own.

5.8 Conclusion: The state multiple

In this chapter, I explored the affective strategies and tactics of the people with whom I worked and the street-level bureaucrats they encountered to explore how the Dutch state writ large is refractured through specific institutions and street-level bureaucrats, becoming a state multiple. To do so, I zoomed in on three different situations.

First, I discussed eligibility checks, which put street-level bureaucrats into the position of gatekeeper, and prompt aspiring applicants to do everything they can to make themselves eligible. In their effort to do so, the people with whom I worked tried to fit themselves into the relevant categories. I had the sense that this did not necessarily resolve street-level bureaucrats' doubts, but rather induced suspicion, even if in the moment itself, street-level bureaucrats appeared receptive to applicants' pleas, in what I read as an effort to defuse tensions.

Second, I scrutinized those scenarios in which street-level bureaucrats seek to offer services to people who do not appear to be interested, such as the situation in which the DT&V officers seek to offer the service of deportation, or the situation in which school care coordinators seek to offer the services of additional behavioral or cognitive tests. I showed that, in an effort to compel people to use such services, street-level bureaucrats repeat again and again that they are working in their clients' best interest. In order to do so, they establish a base to make the option that they offered appear as the best one available. So, DT&V officers said they would deport their clients no matter what, in order to make cooperation seem like the more attractive choice, while school

care coordinators established that they could not maintain a child at their school, so that quick cooperation would be the parents' best option. This rarely convinced the people with whom I worked, who instead suspected that the street-level bureaucrats they encountered prioritized their own or their institutions' interest. Still, in an attempt to maintain good relations with the street-level bureaucrats involved in their lives, in most situations, the people I worked with tried to make it seem like they were cooperating without actually doing so, which they hoped would buy them time to solve the issue at hand in other ways. This stalling did annoy street-level bureaucrats, who tried to enforce cooperation through more aggressive moves, like suspending a child for days or even weeks.

Third, I delved into the post-enrollment phase, during which the people I worked with and the street-level bureaucrats they encountered sought to manage each other's behavior. I showed that they did so by seeking empathy while also drawing their boundaries between their private selves and institutional personae as a particular kind of professional or a particular kind of immigrant respectively. In the process, they often developed complex relationships that at first glance appeared to blur the boundary between public and private, but upon closer look, actually re-negotiated that boundary.

Taken together, I showed that, rather than blurring boundaries, the affective mirror dance between the people whom I accompanied and the street-level bureaucrats they encountered were rooted in, and in turn reproduced distinctions between citizens, street-level bureaucrats, institution, and state. The people with whom I worked drew on these distinctions to hold street-level bureaucrats to account, or compel them to use their discretionary space, while the street-level bureaucrats on the other side of the table drew on these distinctions to present themselves as good professionals, which, depending on the situation, could mean professionals who stick to the rules, or professionals who are willing to bend them.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I announced that this dissertation was not a study of Egyptian migrants, but rather, an inquiry into the nationalization of social-political imagination and infrastructures. In the chapters that followed, I proceeded to describe how the Egyptians whom I met forged their lives as they moved to and settled across Dutch borders (Chapter One), established 'Egyptian' businesses and 'Egyptian' associations (Chapter Two), navigated the terms and conditions of Dutch welfare worlds (Chapter Three), tried to be the best parents they could be for their children (Chapter Four), and tried to induce the right state of mind in the various street-level bureaucrats involved in their lives (Chapter Five).

In the process, I described the vast and open-ended ecosystem of laws, policies, institutions, street-level bureaucrats, and state-subjects that is beyond anyone's direct control, but upon which the people with whom I worked nevertheless tried to act as best as they could, and of which they were ultimately a part. I propose to call this ecosystem the state multiple, which, in my opinion, is to balance an understanding of the state as real in its consequences with a view of the state as a fragmented and incoherent set of images and systems.

Following the Introduction in which I promised to describe how Egyptians danced with the Dutch state multiple, in this Conclusion, I bring to the stage some of the iconic spaces and figures of difference that took part in, and emerged out of, this dance. I do so to show that, as a result of the nationalization of our sociopolitical world, contemporary iconic spaces and figures of difference in one way or another relate to the master categories of "the National" and "the immigrant". Yet, by once again drawing on my fieldwork experiences, I will argue that no matter how profoundly the nationalization of our social-political world shapes (self)-identification, belonging, and social-material inequalities, it does not fully define who we are, or what we do, and this is true both for 'nationals' and for 'immigrants'. I begin by bringing contemporary icons to the stage by summarizing the story of immigration we are made to listen to in the Netherlands, as well as the story of immigration that I have tried to tell.

The immigration stories we are made to listen to

These days, stories of immigration abound. Abdelmalek Sayad (2004) contends that directly or indirectly these stories are always also about nation-states. However, as long as migration and immigration stories are not explicitly interpreted as such, they will inadvertently contribute to the naturalization of the nation-state and the othering of immigrants. Here, I explicitly make the stories of immigration that I grew up with, and that still dominate Dutch public and policy discourse speak to the Netherlands itself, as well as the global order of nation-states.

In a way, the chapters of this dissertation reflect the main parameters of conventional Dutch immigration stories. Chapter One speaks to the story of the immigrant Other as trying to reach Europe by any means possible, threatening 'our' territorial sovereignty, and forcing 'us' to be more and more selective. Chapter Two speaks to the story of the immigrant Other as failing to leave again, forcing 'us' to increase our effort to push 'them' out, as well as the story of the immigrant Other as failing to assimilate into Dutch culture, forcing 'us' to teach them 'our' language, history, norms and values. Chapter Three speaks to the story of the immigrant Other as overusing and potentially abusing welfare services, threatening the future of 'our' social security, and forcing 'us' to introduce more selective eligibility criteria and terms and conditions. Chapter Four speaks to the story of the immigrant Other as imperiling the ethnoracial and sociocultural reproduction of the nation, forcing 'us' to ensure that 'their' children are socialized into virtuous citizen-adults. Chapter Five speaks to the debates of the immigrant Other, and welfare recipients in general, as prioritizing their own interests over the public interest, forcing 'us' to enforce that public interest upon them. In short, this dissertation speaks to the master-narrative of the immigrant Other as a threat that needs, at the very least, be mitigated.

In the years prior to starting this project, I spent eighteen months in Cairo, so by the time I began fieldwork, I had also consumed my fair share of Egyptian stories about emigration and Europe, and the Netherlands in particular. In their own way, these stories too form the backdrop of the subsequent chapters. Chapter One speaks to an Egyptian story of emigration as a way for aspiring youth to overcome a sense of 'stuckedness' and of the West as meritocratic and fair but morally corrupt. Chapter Two speaks to the portrait of Egyptians as divided according to class, but collectively superior to others, including 'morally corrupt' Westerners and 'backward' Moroccans. Chapter Three speaks to the history of the demise of the Egyptian welfare state, and of the image of (Northern) European welfare states as protecting people's social rights. Chapter Four is set against the tension between parents' desire to believe that their children would benefit from Dutch privileges and the haunting fear that, perhaps, instead, they

were subject to racist discrimination. Chapter Five speaks to the narrative of 'good' services and 'bad' interventions, and 'good' professionals, who respect the rules or bend them according to their clients' best interests and 'bad' professionals who do so according to their own or their institutions interest.

In preparation for fieldwork, I read existing studies and newspaper items about Egyptians in the Netherlands. There was not much, but I did find stories about Egyptians in the Netherlands as 'entrepreneurial' (Choenni, 1993; 1997; Fijnaut and Bovenkerk, 1996; Rath 2002) but suspiciously successful, about Egyptian men as likely to marry Dutch citizens and to divorce them three years later (de Valk et al., 2004; Sportel, 2016), about Egyptian women as especially fertile (de Valk et al., 2004), and about Egyptian parents as curiously likely to move their children to stay with their grandparents in Egypt. I also tried to find Egyptian stories about Egyptians in the Netherlands, and I did find a few, notably the movie Hamam fi Amsterdam (see Chapter One). However, after asking around in Egypt, I got the sense that, in Egypt, Egyptians in the Netherlands are imagined as part of the more general group of Egyptian emigrants in Europe, while the Netherlands is imagined as part and parcel of Europe.

The directors of the Egyptian associations to whom I reached out in the first few weeks of fieldwork repeated the stories about Egyptians in the Netherlands that I had already read. In fact, I found that the directors I spoke with had previously told the same stories to the researchers who came before me, and I presume they have continued to tell the story to researchers who came after me. As I described in Chapter Two, my interlocutors drew on the general story of Egyptians in the Netherlands to position themselves vis-à-vis each other, other immigrant Others, and the Dutch (see Chapter Two).

As I continued to hang out at these associations, I discovered that my interlocutors used what they collectively construed as an 'Egyptian divorce crisis in the Netherland' to elaborate a version of the history of Egyptians in the Netherlands that was more rooted in lived experience. As described in Chapter Three, as they talked about divorce, my interlocutors talked about what it had been like to move to and settle in the Netherlands, about the hopes and dreams they once had, how these dreams had shifted over time, and how they were looking back upon what had been and forward to what was to come. These stories did not establish a radically different world than the public stories I described above, but rather offered another rendition of Egyptian men as deceitful, Egyptian women as gullible, Egypt as patriarchal, and the Netherlands as feminist.

People categorized as migrants are asked to tell their immigration stories again and again, and my interlocutors were no exception. This begins during the process of applying for a visa, when people need to provide an explanation for why they wish to travel to the Netherlands. Here,

already, there are good stories to tell and wrong stories to tell, or, at least, stories that increase your chances of obtaining a visa and stories that reduce those chances. If you are granted a visa, you need to tell the story at the border again, preferably in exactly the same words, so as not to create any on-record inconsistencies. If you are not, and you decide to cross the border anyway, you need to tell an alternative story to legitimize why you did so, such as a flight story. After entering the Netherlands, in addition to still having to tell the story of why you came, you will be asked, again and again, why you are staying, and whether or not you are learning the language, and adopting national practices, maybe less so if you are interpellated as 'expat', but then still. How often can you answer a question like that without wondering whether, perhaps, the person asking is not genuinely interested in the answer, but more so in putting you in your place, or rather, outside of the Dutch political community. And how often can you provide an answer without forgetting that the answer you gave is only a particular version of your truth?

What to do with all these stories? We could take these stories at face value, map them onto each other and create a composite image of the Egyptian experience in the Netherlands. However, to take stories at face value is to ignore the specific conditions under which they became the ones that can be told, and, as such, to naturalize those specific conditions. In this particular case of immigration stories, it is to naturalize the idea that people belong to nations, that nations belong to territories, and that national sovereignty is the best, or at least most just, form of authority, or, to denaturalize the idea that people move and settle in order to increase the possibilities of their lives. Another option would be to make explicit the myriad ways in which these stories misrepresent the world, the stereotypes that they help producing, and the particular political project they serve. This is definitely a worthwhile project, and in this dissertation, I have tried to do some of this. However, in my reading, these stories do not merely misrepresent the world. Instead, they are world-making, not only because of the way in which they inform action, as I will discuss in the next section, but also because of the way in which they reflect the paradoxes of the human-made world of nation-states.

Indeed, if we read these stories as a reflection of our social-political world, it appears that we are living in a world in which we can tell ourselves and each other that the global order of nation-states produces and reproduces global inequalities, while simultaneously explaining away these inequalities by referring to the differences between nationals and immigrants. When Dutch commentators tell the story of 'them' desperately trying to reach Europe, and when Egyptians commentators tell the story of emigration as a way to overcome 'stuckedness', they acknowledge the enormous gap between the possibilities of life 'here' and 'over there'. Similarly, when Dutch commentators tell stories about 'them' threatening 'our' way of life and social security, they ac-

knowledge that 'our' privileges rely on 'their' marginalization and exclusion, while Egyptian commentators who relate migration to the demise of the middle-classes, acknowledge the growing gap between what Egyptian youth aspire to and what is available to them in life. Then again, by narrating the Netherlands as meritocratic and fair, and Egypt as corrupt, these commentators make it seem as if these differences have nothing to do with the global order of nation-states.

In sum, if we interpret the stories that we tell each other as reflecting and making a world, we see that knowledge about the way in which the world works is not enough to change it. Or, to put it more polemically, if we care about undoing the structures that harm people, and creating a world that sustains life more equitably, coming up with alternative stories does not suffice. We must act, in solidarity with those who move and settle against the grain, and with a vision for a common future.

Mirror-dancing

In the Introduction, I drew on the work of Michael Keith to suggest that the stories I summarized above emerge through the mirror-dance between "the expectations of the institutions of the urban system and the strategies, tactics, successes and the failures of the migrant minorities of first, second, and subsequent generations." In the chapters that followed, I drew on my fieldwork to describe various acts of this dance, and in this section, I draw on those descriptions to argue that this mirror-dance between institutional strategies and people's tactics is nationalized, and nationalizing.

In Chapter One I explored the mirror dance between efforts to discourage 'third world-looking' people from moving and settling in the Netherlands, and the efforts of impoverished Egyptians to nevertheless move to and settle in the Netherlands. I began by suggesting that, as the hallmark of national sovereignty, borders create an image of horizontal relations between the nations, while actually facilitating the ongoing extractions from former colonies, and making it dangerous for formerly colonized people to follow the wealth to where it is concentrating. This makes it such that, materially speaking, life in a country like the Netherlands indeed offers more than life in a country like Egypt. I then juxtaposed the history of Egyptian emigration and Dutch immigration policies, to suggest that the fact that these policies seem to respond to one another reflects the specific positions of the Netherlands and Egypt within the emerging global order of nation-states.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Dutch state required Egyptian citizens to hold a visa before travelling to the Netherlands, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) were

rejecting visa applications from travelers who were seen to be of no benefit to the country. In addition, the Dutch state was pressuring air carriers to control for visa and had internalized the border by linking the right to reside to the right to work and access most welfare and health-care services. On top of that, the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V) threatened and regularly tried to deport illegalized people, and to do so, could detain them for up to eighteen months.

Meanwhile, for Egyptian youth, traveling to wealthy Europe had become one of the primary ways to close the gap between the life to which they aspired and the life that seemed within reach in Egypt. Yet, to do so, they had to fit themselves into ill-fitting visa-categories, or travel unauthorized. Once in the Netherlands, they had to do whatever it took to maintain their legal status, or to live without one. In the process, the people with whom I worked were relying on existing networks of smugglers, employers, landlords, as well as humanitarians and activists, who helped them survive, but could also exploit and abuse them. In turn, these efforts to move and settle against the grain were invoked by Dutch politicians to call for and in fact implement even stricter visa regulations and border control, which is making it even harder and more dangerous for aspiring Egyptians to travel to the Netherlands as we speak.

Together, this mirror dance creates an image of the Netherlands as an actual nation-state, and of black and brown people who will do anything to travel to the Netherlands, such as taking a boat across the Mediterranean, or conducting a 'sham marriage'. In the meantime, it put professionals in the position to use force, to keep or push people out, and it created a class of people who are easily exploited and even abused, who learn, from the outset, that in the Netherlands, you have to claim your rights against the grain.

In Chapter Two, I elaborated on the mirror dance between top-down efforts to manage so-called 'guests', 'minorities', 'allochthonous people' and 'people with a migration background', and the efforts of impoverished Egyptians to settle in the Netherlands. I showed that (Dutch) immigration research homogenizes immigrants by grouping them according to nationality, and subsequently particularizes them by describing what it is specifically that makes one national group of immigrants different from the other, and, of course, from 'us', nationals. The people with whom I worked had previously provided input for such research on Egyptians, and in turn drew on the resultant reports to narrate their own history, as well as the difference between them and the native Dutch, as well as other immigrant Others, notably 'Moroccans'.

Despite, or actually because of this emphasis on nationality as that which connects and disconnects us, since the early 1990s, Dutch integration policies have been redesigned to dissolve nationality-based immigrant groups, to the point that a lack of contact with fellow nationals

is seen as a sign of integration, if not assimilation, rather than, for example, loneliness. In the meantime, the Dutch government introduced so-called 'target-group policies', which group together people on the basis of a particular problem, such as obesity, or social isolation. Unsurprisingly, Egyptians in Amsterdam still wanted to come together on the basis of their nationality, to reminisce about the country they had left behind, share tips and tricks on how to survive in the country they had moved to, talk about Dutch and Egyptian politics, and mostly to gossip about one another. In a context in which everything is expensive, one of the only ways to structurally do so was for some of the directors of the associations formerly known as Egyptian to apply for funding for a targeted workshop, such as a workshop for 'disempowered Arab women', or 'Uninvolved Arab fathers'. These workshops successfully brought together Egyptians who may or may not have fallen in the targeted group, but, also worked to further stigmatize 'Arabs' and 'Muslims', and to fuel tensions between white Dutch policy professionals and volunteers, who felt betrayed, and the Egyptians who had managed to come together as such.

In Chapter Three, I investigated efforts to care for and control 'at risk' and 'risky' populations on the one hand, and impoverished people's efforts to claim their social rights on the other. I did so by describing the divorces that I saw unfold or about which I otherwise gained intimate knowledge to show that welfare functions as a sorting mechanism, with eligibility criteria, actual material provisions, and the terms and conditions of the services on offer as the concrete technologies that determine who lives under what kind of circumstances. Eligibility criteria make it such that social services are only available for people below a certain threshold. Material provisions determine what conditions are actually good enough for marginalized people to live under, while the terms and conditions of use become the duties that accompany their, but not all of our, social rights. The Egyptians with whom I worked tried to act as best as they could on these circumstances, but often found that they were unable to access services to which they (felt they) had a right, most notably social housing, or the right to see their children. In the process, they sometimes could not help but think of themselves as second rate citizens, in part because as dual citizens they actually had less rights than people who only hold citizenship in the Netherlands, and in part because they recognized that it was not a coincidence that they lived under much more difficult circumstances than 'Dutch' people.

In Chapter Four, I looked into the efforts of Egyptian parents and the Dutch parenting professionals to shape children in their respective images. I started off by discussing the parenting courses for mothers and fathers 'with migration backgrounds'. These courses built on the premise that 'they' need to learn how to turn 'their' children into 'our' future citizens, but under the careful supervision of the Egyptian directors with whom I worked they became sites in

which fathers and mothers could discuss their hopes, fears, and doubts. I described a course for Arab fathers on involved fatherhood which became a site in which Egyptian fathers and mothers discussed the challenges of raising Egyptian children in a context in which Egyptian cultural practices were frowned upon, and a course for Muslim women, which became a site in which Egyptian mothers expressed their hopes that their children would do well in school, as well as their fear that they were being discriminated against. These fears were widespread, but none of the parents I worked with were ready to discuss their concerns directly with the actors involved in their children's lives, lest they hamper their relationship, and thus harm their children. In this context, parents' greatest fear was for their children to be removed from their home. This was on the horizon for Amira, who in response organized for her son to move to his father's care in Egypt, showing that, in the end, some parents could opt out of the Dutch system. The option of removing children, to which both state actors and parents could resort, haunted both public debates and everyday interactions.

In Chapter Five, I examined street-level bureaucrats' efforts to induce the right state of mind in their clients, and Egyptians' efforts to do the same, but the other way around. I began by discussing how eligibility checks prompted Egyptians to once again fit themselves into the right categories in order to convince street-level bureaucrats that they were eligible, which appeared to activate the atmosphere of suspicion that is baked into eligibility checks. I then discussed street-level bureaucrats' attempts to convince the people I worked with to consent to the kind of services they said were in everyone's best interest, but which the people I worked with often saw as the problem, which was most notably so in the case of the services of deportation. Finally, I turned to the post-enrollment phase. This phase was marked by the twin efforts of street-level bureaucrats and the people I with whom I worked to make the other behave as they wanted them. I then suggested that although all this affective labor might undermine the ideal of impersonal authority, in practice, both the street-level bureaucrats and the people whom I accompanied held on to these ideals, and drew on them in order to negotiate the boundaries between public and private, with both seeking to define which problems were public and thus required public solutions, and which problems were private and thus required private solutions.

In sum, in Chapters One through Five, I showed how various social engineering practices that draw on the idea of the nation-state produce and reproduce multiple categories of immigrants. This was extremely clear-cut at the border, but in other contexts, such as welfare, or the education system, these categories were less prominent, leaving the people with whom I worked to wonder whether they were still interpellated as immigrants, and even whether that mattered at all. This was not a question they could answer, but rather a question that indicated a haunt-

ing doubt about their standing in the Netherlands. Indeed, seeing themselves as different from the Dutch, the people with whom I worked knew well that, both formally and informally, their dual citizenship, their phenotypical features, their names, or their religion, could be made to matter. This made for a mode of being in the Netherlands that always verged on existential insecurity, even if many of the people with whom I worked were confident that, no matter what, they would be able to take care of themselves, if only because they had already done so many times before.

Life beyond the nation-state

As described in the Introduction, in the 1990s, anthropologists of the state began to develop an understanding of states as 'fictional realities' (Aretxaga, 2003), or diffuse and fragmented sets of 'ideas', 'systems' and 'practices' that have no clear boundaries, are neither coherent nor stable, but nevertheless imagined and reified as monolithic and unified entities (cf. Nagengast, 1994; Aretxaga, 2003; Sharma and Gupta, 2009). In response, in the late 2000s, anthropologists began to suggest that while states are indeed extremely incoherent and volatile, they are, at the same time, extremely stable and consolidated (Marcus, 2008; Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 2014; Babül, 2017). I contend that our ability to see this as a paradox stems from methodological nationalism, or our ability to ignore or take for granted that today's states are, or at least meant to be, nation-states. Indeed, if we foreground the desire for national sovereignty, we begin to see the state's incoherence and volatility as the result of varied, contradicting and changing definitions of national interests, and the state's ostensible stability and consolidation as a response to internal and external threats.

In this nationalized world, state institutions ultimately derive their legitimacy from serving the national interest, whether that is defined as maintaining borders, integrating immigrants, caring for and controlling at risk and risky populations, or schooling children. This is a problem for everyone whose interests are subordinated to, or seen as antithetical to the national interest, and while this could include everyone, people who are already marginalized are much more likely to fall into this category. This is most readily apparent in the case of services that restrict individual liberties in the name of the nation, such as carrier checks that force some traveler to take the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, deportation services, or closed youth facilitates. At first glance, it is less apparent in those services that are meant to protect people's social rights, like social housing and welfare benefits. In my experience, professionals representing this supposedly 'left-hand' of the state readily deny their connection to profession-

als working for more punitive organizations. However, upon closer look, these services are also inextricably linked to the social order of nation-states, because they categorically exclude non-nationals, and, moreover, produce publics, that, in one way or another, relate to the nation, or fall outside of it.

The above is not to say that national interests are clear-cut. They are not. In fact, they often clash, leading to conflicts among (street-level) bureaucrats, between (street-level) bureaucrats and citizens, and between citizens. This is why the state multiple appears to be so contradictory at times. However, it is to say that, in this world, public organizations need to prove that they are there for a greater good in order to survive. If they successfully claim to serve the national interest, they may get away with the use of violence, for it is in the name of the nation that we let people drown in the Mediterranean Sea, deport people to countries where they will be tortured, imprison children allegedly for their own benefit, and leave people homeless. And it is in these instances that states seem consolidated and stable. Here, I do not wish to suggest that states hold a monopoly on the definition of legitimate violence, which would ignore alternative answers to the question of what forms of violence are legitimate. Rather, I want to suggest that, in the world of nation-states, states sanction violence by referring to, and thus instituting, national interests.

This world was built and is rebuilt to be nationalist. However, no matter how much we invest in the nationalization of identities, belonging, and inequality, nationalization will always fall short of creating a world of fixed boundaries between nations, territories, and sovereign. People will cross borders designed to keep them out, settle in places made hostile, lay claims on wealth stolen from them, and maintain a sense of self that escapes identification in the process. In other words, they will not let themselves be reduced to how they are categorized by nationalist technologies. This is not to celebrate their agency, or to suggest that they are fighting for change. In fact, most of the people who transcend nation-states do so in search of a sedentary lifestyle, a stable income, home ownership, and a hetero-normative family life. However, it is to celebrate that efforts to control people will ultimately fall short, because people will always seek life.

As long as we are stuck with the language we have, we will not be able to speak of all the ways in which people live outside of that language. In fact, trying to do so is only the first step towards trying to control and contain life. We may, however, feel it. We may feel it when we encounter practices and ideas that cannot yet be put into words, that challenge the ways in which we hitherto inhabited the world, and when we find ourselves acting beyond our own scripts. I felt it when I worked through the existing literature to make the epistemic shift from thinking about immigrants through the epistemic of nation-states, to thinking about nation-

states as historically contingent, and produced and reproduced through everyday practices. I felt it when I reached out to all those Egyptians whom I did not yet know, who invited me into their everyday life, and showed me what their world was like. And I felt it when we shared experiences that we could not put into words, and perhaps most sharply when I had to put it all in a dissertation and felt lost for words. We are all human, and we are all part of a larger ecosystem that shapes and sustains us, that is beyond our control, and cannot even be put into words, because language is limiting.

The point here is not that I struggled to represent my ideas in writing, which is not so interesting, or that my representations ultimately fall short, which is similarly unsurprising. The point is that the lives that people live cannot, and should not, be reduced to what they tell us about the world in which we live, while our analysis of the world in which we live should not, and cannot, be reduced to our observations of everyday life. It is in this spirit that I wrote this dissertation, and it is in this spirit that I offer the final story, about the untimely death of Bahaa, who was very dear to me.

Epilogue
Bahaa, or the desire to live, and live on

In the fall of 2018, Bahaa felt a nagging pain in his stomach. His doctor initially told him to take some rest and to try not to smoke, or at least smoke a bit less for few a days. But, the pain did not subside, and when he returned to the doctor, he was prescribed antibiotics and painkillers. After a week of suffering, he was further examined by a specialist, who found that the pain in his stomach was caused by an abscess that would have to be surgically removed on short notice. Bahaa was transferred to a hospital, to be monitored until his surgery. In his usual fashion, Bahaa went live on Facebook from the ambulance, updating his many followers on the upcoming surgery (in Arabic), while also taking the opportunity to discuss the Dutch healthcare system with the nurse on duty (in Dutch), which they agreed was excellent but used to be better and should improve again.

In the days before his surgery, the hospital waiting room turned into a reunion of Egyptians in the Netherlands, some of whom had not seen or spoken to each other in years. Bahaa was in pain and bedridden for most of the time, but the fact that so many people showed up seemed to cheer him up. They remembered me, he told me gleefully during one of my visits, looking happier than I had seen him since his ex-wife and fourteen-year-old daughter Amal had moved to Egypt.

The hospital personnel were less happy about the many visitors. Many people, including me, visited outside visiting hours and the number of visitors inside Bahaa's room almost permanently exceeded the maximum of two that the hospital regulations allowed. Gamal, one of Bahaa's closest friends, took it upon himself to negotiate between the hospital personnel and the crowd of visitors, asking personnel for their understanding and urging the visitors to comply with the directions of personnel. He also made sure that there was at least one person in the waiting room at all times, to receive visitors and to be available for Bahaa and hospital personnel. Gamal's wife, Um Yassin, brought home-cooked meals for Bahaa and whoever else was around.

After a week of relative joy, Bahaa underwent surgery. According to his doctors, the surgery

was successful, but Bahaa did not feel well. A day later, he called me, speaking so softly that I struggled to hear him well. He had a favor to ask me, he said. When I entered Bahaa's room half an hour later, Gamal and half a dozen of men were gathered around his bed, talking quietly. Bahaa was hooked to machines, with one cable running up his nose, one into his arm, and one underneath his blanket. His face was grey, his eyes were closed. I stood in the door until Gamal told me to come forward. I kneeled beside the bed and took Bahaa's hand. He opened his eyes and attempted a smile. He pulled my arm a little, so I bent over to kiss him hello. He waved at Gamal, who took the hint, and ordered everyone to leave. One by one, the men kissed Bahaa goodbye.

After everyone had left, Bahaa quietly handed me a letter from the school attendance office. The letter was short and to the point. It stated that, according to the available information, Bahaa's daughter Amal was not enrolled in any school, asked her parents/caregivers to provide proof of enrollment, and reminded them that keeping her from school was a criminal offense. As I finished reading, Bahaa explained that Amal was still registered at his address in the Netherlands so that the Dutch state would continue to cover her healthcare costs, as it does for all citizens below the age of eighteen, provided that they reside in the Netherlands. The school attendance office had been inquiring about Amal for two years now, but so far, he had convinced them — and perhaps himself – that Amal was only temporarily attending school in Egypt. However, Bahaa knew that, per policy, after two years or more, a stay abroad is no longer temporary, and he worried that Amal would be deregistered as a resident if he would tell the school attendance officer that she was still abroad. This would mean that she would lose access to the Dutch healthcare system, and that she would be considered a 'newcomer' in the Dutch education system if she would return. This deeply worried Bahaa, who softly asked me to help him find a way out.

That afternoon, I called the school attendance office. I explained that Amal's father was hospitalized and suggested that Amal and her mother might travel to the Netherlands to visit him and make further plans. After hesitating a little, the lady on the other end of the phone kindly extended the deadline to provide further information to a few weeks later. I was excited for what I considered a small and unexpected win, but when I called Bahaa, he was in a bad way, and did not really understand me.

Two days later, at two in the morning, Gamal called to inform me that Bahaa had unexpectedly slipped into a coma. While his doctors were still running tests, they had indicated that he might not make it through the night, and Gamal wanted people to come over so that Bahaa would not be alone if he would indeed pass away. I quickly got dressed and hurried to the hos-

pital. In the morning, a scan revealed that one of the internal stitches had torn. After an emergency surgery that took a couple of hours, his doctors announced that Bahaa would not wake up and had only a few days to live. News about Bahaa's impending passing quickly spread, and throughout the day, more and more people came to pay their respects and pray for him, including many people who were no longer on speaking terms with him due to personal or political conflicts. Bahaa's estranged brother, Malek, who also lived in the Netherlands, came to spend the last days of his life with him. And even Fatma and Amal travelled to the Netherlands and sat beside his bed for several hours. When Bahaa passed away, over fifty people had gathered in the hospital, praying and mourning together.

Bahaa's sudden and unexpected death came as a shock, but there was too much to arrange to contemplate it at that moment. It went without question that Bahaa would have to be buried in accordance with Islamic law. However, Gamal and some other friends felt that he should be buried in the Netherlands, rather than Egypt, a country he could not visit during the last years of his life due to his political activities. His brother Malek instead felt that Bahaa should be buried in their family grave in Egypt. To complicate things, there were competing ideas about who was authorized to take decisions. According to Dutch law, Amal was Bahaa's only lawful heir, and if she had been above eighteen, she would have been in charge of the funeral, and inherit all his Dutch belongings. However, since she was not, she would be represented by her legal custodian, in this case her mother, with whom Bahaa was fighting until the very end, and who had refused to come to the Netherlands when he was still conscious. This was hard to accept for Malek, and especially for Gamal and his other close friends, who had stood by Bahaa throughout the divorce as well as the painful years of depression afterwards. Meanwhile, according to the Egyptian version of Islamic family law, Malek and his two remaining sisters were also lawful heirs, meaning they would inherit from Bahaa's Egyptian properties, and should have a say in the funeral. Amal, and her mother/legal custodian could not ignore this, but they did not completely trust Malek either. Finally, while respecting the role of Bahaa's direct family members, Gamal and some other close friends felt that they should take the lead on the funeral, since they had been like family to him for many years. Fatma and Malek generally agreed, but feared that Gamal and others would get involved in the inheritance too, and began to accuse them of stealing money.

I continued to be involved, in part because Bahaa had involved me in the project of safeguarding his daughter's legal status, and in part because both Gamal and Malek continued to solicit my services. However, I felt more distance from the people with whom I was working with than I had at any other point in the year and a half that I had known them. At the time,

I told myself that I felt like I was not allowed to mourn in the way that they were mourning, but in hindsight, I realize that they did give me the space, but that I just could not connect to the way in which they were mourning, and did not have anyone else to mourn Bahaa with in a way that would have soothed me. I attended the *salaat al-janaazah*, the Islamic funeral prayer, but it did not resonate with me, and I felt out of place accepting condolences from the congregation along with his family members and other close friends. Afterwards, we all went to the burial site, and after that, we had a dinner in the neighborhood center where Ali usually hosted his neighborhood restaurant, but I could not relate to the conversation, and I left as soon as I could. At home I cried.

It is tempting for me to stay away from these emotions, and instead use Bahaa's untimely death to analyze dying as another instance of the mirror-dance between the effort to manage immigrants on the one hand, and people's efforts to manage their own life on the other. In fact, this epilogue started as the final chapter to this dissertation in which I would just do that. I brought it back down to this epilogue, not because I thought that my analysis was not going anywhere, but rather, because I felt it was necessary for me, and for this dissertation, to end with the eruption of emotion in the weeks and months after Bahaa left this earth.

The thing is, until today, I cry when I talk or write about Bahaa, not necessarily because I miss him, but rather because what happened to him makes me feel so utterly powerless. This world is organized to make life hard for people like Bahaa, and although his death cannot be attributed to the harm inflicted upon him, it certainly did not help. Either way, the way he died is symbolic for the way he lived: in good spirit, and always looking for ways to improve his, or else his daughter's, life. In other words, it represents that he would not be crushed by the world as it was. And my emotions show that, no matter all that is in place to keep people like Bahaa and myself disconnected, and no matter how deeply we disagreed on almost everything that mattered to us, we all have the ability to connect to one another on the basis of a shared humanity.

I wish Bahaa went to someplace better after all, as he believed he would. And I wish those of us who are still on this earth, and those of us who will come after us, will take it upon us to change the world for the better.

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Nederlandse samenvatting

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik aan de hand van etnografisch veldwerk met Egyptenaren in Amsterdam hoe de idee van nationaliteit in de praktijk gebracht werd en wordt, en welke gevolgen dat heeft op hoe we in deze wereld (samen)leven. Deze ongebruikelijke vragen, en de meer voor de hand liggende antwoorden die ik geef zijn de uitkomst van mijn inspanning om te leren van 'tot migrant gemaakten' zonder hen tot onderzoeksobject te reduceren, en zodoende bij te dragen aan dat proces van migranten maken. Dat ging ongeveer zo.

In maart 2016 begon ik aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen aan promotieonderzoek naar de ervaringen van Egyptenaren in en met Amsterdam, en Nederland. Ik kende nog geen enkele Egyptenaar in Amsterdam, en het enige wat ik over hen dacht te weten was dat veel van hen in snackbars in werkten. Maar, in de jaren daarvoor woonde en werkte ik in Cairo, en ik keek er naar uit om via hun een andere kant van het het land waarin ik opgroeide te leren kennen. Ik wist ook nog niet echt waar mijn onderzoek over zou moeten gaan, maar gegeven dat ik met Egyptenaren in Amsterdam zou gaan werken, wist ik wel dat ik me op een manier moest gaan verhouden tot de langslepende publieke debatten over migratie- en integratieproblematiek, en tot het nog langer slepende Nederlands racisme. En zo begon ik te lezen.

Ik begon met het werk van kritisch migratiewetenschappers. Van hen leerde ik over methodologisch nationalisme, oftewel de neiging van migratieonderzoekers en andere sociaal wetenschappers om de natiestaat niet te bevragen, maar als een natuurlijk gegeven te beschouwen. Als gevolg van methodologisch nationalisme lijken mensen die er voor kiezen om 'hun' land te verlaten, en zich in een ander land te vestigen een anomalie, of een curiositeit diehet onderzoeken waard zijn. Sterker nog, als we aannemen dat mensen van nature tot volkeren horen, dat volkeren van nature in aan afgebakend stuk land horen, en dat het dus rechtvaardig is als zij het in dat land voor het zeggen hebben, dan lijken mensen die over landsgrenzen verhuizen niet alleen een anomalie, maar ook een bedreiging voor de natuurlijke orde van de wereld. Maar, ik las verder, en leerde dat we het woord 'migratie' in de praktijk vooral gebruiken voor zogenaamd lastige, of zelfs onwenselijke verhuizingen. In Nederland gaat dat dan om niet-witte mensen die onafhankelijk van een werkgever naar Nederland komen, en blijven. Ten slotte leerde ik migratieonderzoek naar 'migratiestromen' en 'integratieprocessen' precies die groepen er uit pikt,

en zodoende al die ideeën normaliseert. Samenvattend kwam ik tot de conclusie dat onderzoek naar migratie en immigratie racistisch en racialiserend is, in die zin dat het wortelt in racistische ideeën over wie migrant is, en die ideeën voedt.

Tegelijkertijd bestudeerde ik hedendaagse antropologie, en leerde dat onze 'observatieobjecten' niet automatisch onze 'studieobjecten' hoeven te zijn, oftewel dat onderzoek met een specifieke groep mensen niet over hen hoeft te gaan. De empirische feiten van de Haïtiaanse revolutie bieden inzicht in Westerse geschiedschrijving en kennisproductie, en observaties van het dagelijks leven van moslims in Frankrijk kan onderzoek naar Frans secularisme zijn. Vanuit die gedachte begon ik onderzoek met migranten te lezen als onderzoek naar grenzen en natiestaten gaat, en dat mijn eigen onderzoek met Egyptenaren in Amsterdam over Nederland zou gaan. En zo begon ik aan mijn etnografische veldwerk.

In januari 2017 nam ik contact op met de voorzitters van de actievere Egyptische verenigingen in Amsterdam. In schreef hen dat ik onderzoek deed naar Nederland vanuit het perspectief van Egyptenaren, en dat ik hun graag wilde spreken over hun ervaringen, en indien mogelijk mee wilde naar hun afspraken bij (overheids)instellingen. En ik bood aan om in ruil daarvoor mee te denken, te bellen naar instanties, formulieren in te vullen, en/of te vertalen tussen het Nederlands en het Arabisch. Die voorzitters reageerden enthousiast, en na een eerste kennismakingsgesprek nodigden zij mij van harte uit voor hun bijeenkomsten en activiteiten. Ik ging dankbaar in op hun uitnodiging, en zo ging ik een jaar lang naar de wekelijkse bijeenkomsten van drie verschillende stichtingen, en naar allerlei etentjes en feestjes. Daarnaast nam ik deel aan allerlei workshops, waaronder een workshop mentale gezondheid voor Arabische vrouwen, een workshop over radicalisering voor moslimouders, en een workshop betrokken vaderschap voor Arabische mannen. Mijn aanbod om mensen te helpen bleek ook zeer in trek, en voor dat ik het wist hielp ik allerlei Egyptenaren in hun missie door het Nederlandse institutionele landschap.

De mensen die ik zodoende leerde kennen hadden weinig met elkaar gemeen. Ja, zij kregen bij geboorte de Egyptische nationaliteit, en waren op een moment in hun leven naar Nederland waren verhuist, maar sommige van hen waren geboren in de jaren '40 en al jaren in Amsterdam, terwijl anderen pas net 18 waren, en in Amsterdam aankwamen tijdens mijn veldwerk. Sommige van hen waren Moslim, andere waren Koptisch, en voor sommige was religie onbelangrijk. Sommige waren aanhangers van de Egyptische president Abdelfatah el-Sisi, anderen waren lid van de Moslimbroederschap, en weer anderen waren betrokken in Nederlandse partijpolitiek. Sommige hadden een Nederlands paspoort, andere werden geïllegaliseerd, en weer andere waren in Nederland met een paspoort uit een ander land uit de Europese Unie. En, mede door deze verschillen, hadden zij heel verschillend ervaringen met en visies op Nederland.

De 'Egyptenaar in Amsterdam' bestaat dus niet. In plaats daarvan zijn er allerlei mensen die op heel specifieke momenten als zodanig geïdentificeerd worden, door zichzelf, door elkaar, door de Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst, door het Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, en voor onderzoekers zoals ik. Via hun zag ik Nederland in tal van hoedanigheden. Ik zag Nederland als visa-kantoortjes in Cairo, het Justitieel Complex in Schiphol, waar 'uitzetbaren' opgesloten worden in afwachting van hun mogelijke deportatie, buurtcentra, scholen, ziekenhuizen, en gemeentekantoren. Ik kwam Nederland tegen in de persoon van de dienstdoende medewerkers van de Koninklijke Marechaussee aan de grens, de medewerkers van de Immigratie en Naturalisatiedienst (IND), de Dienst Terugkeer en Vertrekt (DT&V), het Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemersverzekeringen (UWV), en, minder direct, in sociaal-maatschappelijk werkers, docenten, huisartsen, en baliemedewerkers. En, ik voelde Nederland als een bron van hoop, vrees, en twijfel.

Op basis van deze bevindingen concludeer ik in mijn proefschrift dat Nederland en natiestaten meervoudig zijn. De verschillende Nederlanden niet altijd met elkaar lijken te rijmen, beargumenteer ik dat zij wel degelijk samenhangen, en wel via het formele en informele onderscheid tussen "wij" en "zij". Dat onderscheid heeft zijn oorsprong in het onderscheid dat in de koloniën werd gemaakt tussen Nederlanders en wat toen de inheemse bevolking werd genoemd, kreeg opnieuw vorm in migratiewetgeving en het onderscheid tussen "staatsburgers" en "vreemdelingen", en sluimert ook binnen de formele politieke gemeenschap van Nederlandse staatsburgers, want niet-witte Nederlandse staatsburgers worden nog altijd geracialiseerd als "Nederlanders met een migratieachtergrond", oftewel mensen die toch net even andere Nederlanders zijn.

Ik maak dit argument in vijf empirische hoofdstukken. In ieder hoofdstuk bespreek ik één van de technologieën die dat onderscheid tussen wij en zij, en dus de idee en materiële werkelijkheid van Nederland produceren. In hoofdstuk één laat ik zien hoe Nederlandse grenzen onderscheid maken tussen enerzijds Nederlandse burgers, en anderzijds verschillende soorten niet-burgers, waaronder 'EU-burgers', 'toeristen', 'illegalen', 'asielzoekers' en 'afhankelijke echtgenoten'. Ik begin met de observatie dat de regulering van menselijke mobiliteit niet los te zien is van de regulering van de mobiliteit van rijkdommen en goederen. Op basis van die zienswijze analyseer ik Nederlandse grenzen als onderdeel van een globale infrastructuur die er voor zorgt dat landen als Nederland zich kunnen verrijken ten kosten van landen als Egypte, en dat burgers uit die rijkere landen makkelijk over de hele wereld kunnen reizen, terwijl het voor burgers uit die armere landen steeds moeilijker en zelfs gevaarlijker wordt, getuige ook de toename in grensdoden. Tegen deze achtergrond vertel ik de verhalen van Mostafa, Saïed, en Anastasia, die

op heel verschillende, maar moeilijke omstandigheden naar Nederland kwamen. Hun verhalen laten zien dat die mobiliteitsinfrastructuur Egypte tot een land zonder en Nederland tot een land met toekomst maakt, en er voor zorgt dat jonge Egyptenaren die naar Nederland proberen te komen telkens heen en weer gaan tussen het gevoel dat die toekomst binnen handbereik is, en het gevoel dat ze toch weer vast zijn komen te zitten.

In hoofdstuk twee beschrijf ik de 'wij' en 'zij' groepen die ontstaand uit de 'spiegeldans' tussen aan de ene kant beleidsmakers die immigranten er toe willen bewegen zich op een bepaalde manier in te voegen, en aan de andere kant mensen die zo goed en als kwaad als het gaat een nieuw leven proberen op te bouwen. Ik beschrijf de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse minderhedenbeleid van de jaren '70, het allochtonenbeleid jaren '90, en het huidige integratie- en doelgroepen beleid. Daar tegenover beschrijf ik hoe Egyptenaren in de jaren '70 naar Nederland begonnen te komen, en hun pogingen een goed leven op te bouwen. Ik breng die twee samen door te beschrijven hoe Egyptische snackbars en stichtingen in het vizier van beleidsmakers en onderzoekers kwamen, en zo iconisch werden dat zelfs ik die al kende voordat ik aan mijn onderzoek begon. Aan de hand van die omschrijving benadruk ik dat algemene categorie van 'de migrant' allerlei lokaal specifieke vormen aanneemt, maar dat iedere figuur van de migrant gekenmerkt wordt door de manier(en) waarop hij of zij afwijkt van de norm, soms in positieve zin, maar veel vaker in negatieve zin. Of eigenlijk, in die zin dat 'zij' en probleem vormen voor 'ons'.

In hoofdstuk drie analyseer in de verzorgingsstaat als een sorteermachine. Dat sorteren werkt via de specifieke voorwaarden waar mensen aan moeten voldoen om in aanmerking komen voor voorzieningen als een uitkering en sociale huisvesting, en via waar die voorzieningen concreet in voorzien, hoe hoog de uitkering is, hoe groot de woning. Die bepalen immers de omstandigheden waaronder 'zij' die gebruik maken van die voorzieningen hun leven vormgeven. De meeste voorzieningen uitsluitend toegankelijk zijn voor Nederlandse staatsburgers, maar op het eerste gezicht lijken zij verder blind te zijn voor migratieachtergrond. Dat wil zeggen, de verzorgingsstaat lijkt burgers eerder te sorteren op basis van inkomen, leeftijd, en handicaps. Toch sijpelt migratieachtergrond door, en dat lat ik zien aan de hand van het verhaal van Ismaïl, die na het bereiken van zijn pensioenleeftijd zijn Nederlandse nationaliteit opgaf en naar Egypte verhuisde. Op basis van zijn verhaal, en de verhalen van mannen en vrouwen zoals hem, analyseer ik Nederlands burgerschap als hiërarchisch.

In hoofdstuk vier beschrijf ik hoe ouders enerzijds vasthielden aan de hoop dat hun kinderen zouden profiteren van het Nederlandse onderwijssysteem, en anderzijds wisten dat het niet vanzelfsprekend is dat kinderen zoals die van hun dezelfde kansen zouden krijgen als 'Hollandse', oftewel witte kinderen. Dit was een angst die de ouders met wie ik werkte niet graag onder woor-

den brachten, althans niet ten overstaan van witte Nederlanders. Ze voelden namelijk wel aan dat het ter sprake brengen van racisme ook tegen hen zou kunnen werken. In plaats daarvan ontwikkelde ouders allerlei strategieën. Die strategieën lieten hen, paradoxaal genoeg, af steken tegen witte ouders. Ik beschrijf deze strategieën om te beschrijven hoe ouders ruimte probeerden te maken voor hun eigen versies van wij en zij, maar tegelijkertijd dezelfde rechten als alle andere Nederlanders probeerden te claimen.

In hoofdstuk vijf beschrijf ik enerzijds de inspanningen van professionals om hun cliënten te juiste kant op te motiveren, en anderzijds de inspanningen van de mensen met wie ik werkte om de professionals die zij tegen kwamen te motiveren hun best te doen. Die ontmoetingen creëren een 'wij' van mensen die Nederland letterlijk belichamen, en een 'zij' van zogenaamd individuen die de overheid moeten navigeren. En, het is in die concrete ontmoetingen dat alle eerdergenoemde categorieën van 'wij' en 'zij' in het dagelijks leven landen, en onderhandeld worden, en het is dus ook in die ontmoetingen dat een anderszins meervoudig Nederland tijdelijk enkelvoudig wordt.

In de conclusie herhaal ik dat de migrant en de natiestaat alleen in relatie tot elkaar bestaan, en meervoudig zijn, omdat zij in verschillende praktijken materieel worden gemaakt. Vervolgens herhaal ik de bevindingen uit de hoofdstukken één tot en met vijf om te beargumenteren dat hoewel migratie- en immigratiepolitiek de wereld nationaliseert, en zodoende sociaal-materiële ongelijkheden in deze wereld verdiept en veroorzaakt, maar uiteindelijk niets of niemand definieert.

In de epiloog vertel ik het verhaal van Bahaa, met wie ik heel hecht was, tot hij in oktober 2018 plotseling overleed. Zijn dood illustreert dat een leven als migrant een verhoogd risico met zich meebrengt om te eindigen in de categorie van 'zij' die vroegtijdig sterven. Maar, in plaats van dat verhaal te vertellen, kies ik er in de epiloog voor om te benadrukken dat die categorieën van 'wij' en 'zij' maar tijdelijke constructen zijn, waar we ons van los kunnen worstelen, als is het maar voor even. Bahaa heeft mij oneindig veel geleerd over de wereld van natiestaten, maar het is aan mij om hem niet te reduceren tot alleen maar dat. Het is in die geest dat ik mijn proefschrift schreef.

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Curriculum Vitae

Wiebe Ruijtenberg was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands, on July 16, 1989. Between 2001 and 2008, he attended the Stichtse Vrije School in Zeist, the Netherlands, where he received a pre-university education. After obtaining a BSc in Sociology from the University of Amsterdam in 2012, he moved to Cairo, Egypt, to study Arabic. In 2013, he enrolled in the Research Master in Social Sciences at the University of Amsterdam, from which he graduated cum laude with a dissertation on the social life of gated communities in Cairo. In 2015, Wiebe taught urban anthropology at the Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences. In 2016, he started his PhD at the department for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Radboud University, Nijmegen. In 2018, he was awarded an Erasmus+ Staff Mobility grant to travel to the American University in Cairo, for which he developed and taught the Short Winter Course Migrant Citizenship in an Anxious Europe. In 2020, Wiebe began teaching tutorials at the institute for Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University. In 2021, together with Neske Baerwaldt, he received funding from Leiden University Fund to develop what became De Verbranders, a podcast on Europe's borders and resistance against them. Currently, Wiebe is a postdoctoral researcher in the Crafting Resillience project at the Van Vollenhoven Institute for Law, Governance and Society, Leiden University. In this new project, Wiebe studies how social-, healthcare, and police workers diagnose their clients, and to what affects.