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

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Citation

Ruijtenberg, W. D. (2024, May 28). *Living and dying with the state: The Netherlands according to Egyptians in Amsterdam*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3754811

Version:	Publisher's Version
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Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3754811

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Introduction
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.