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

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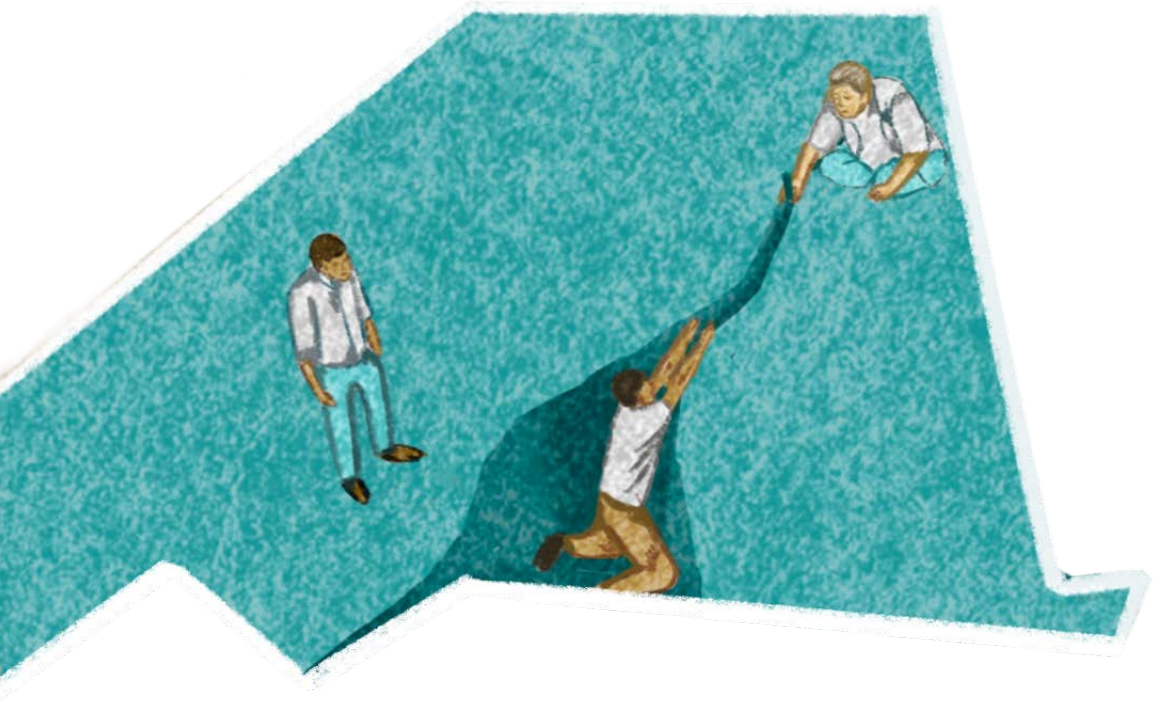

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Borders

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.