



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

The Department of Social Science

Egyptian Diaspora, Power and Resistance

An ethnographic study of the Egyptian diaspora in Berlin and Paris, summer 2019

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Master's thesis in Visual Anthropology...SVF-3903-1...June 2020



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Dedication

For Shady Habash, a 24-year-old Egyptian filmmaker who died on 2 May 2020 inside Tora maximum-security prison, Cairo. He was left dying in his cell for two days as prison guards ignored his cellmates' pleas for medical intervention. Shady had been illegally detained for over two years without a trial when he died. He had been imprisoned for producing a music video mocking Egyptian president Abdelfattah El-Sisi.

Acknowledgments

Can you stare at your open wounds? Can you examine them and try to understand why they have been inflicted upon you? Can you tolerate the pain of cleaning your wounds, of healing them? I could. And it was only because of the tens of people who supported me. Some of them have done so much that I feel obliged to thank them by name.

I want to thank my supervisor, Peter Ian Crawford. I was able to complete this project thanks to his understanding, support, and care.

I also want to thank all the professors and supervisors who helped me with this project especially Len Kamerling, Andreas Buch, and Francisca Prudence Uriri.

I want to thank my informants from the Egyptian diaspora in Paris and Berlin, especially Tamim Heikel who hosted me during my stay in Paris and introduced me to the community, and Ahmed Saeed and Safwan Mohamed, with whom I spent most of my time in Berlin.

I also want to thank Hege Kristin Widnes from UIT. Without her unlimited support, care, and encouragement, I believe this project would have never been more than an impossible dream for me.

I also want to thank Majid El-Edwan, my manager at my other job. Without him believing in me, I would have never had the opportunity to do this project.

Last but not least I want to thank the thesis editor, Julia Foley. She has done an amazing job in a very short timeline.

Abstract

The Egyptian revolution in 2011 ended dramatically in 2013 with the military taking control of the country in a coup. The current repressive government has forced many activists, journalists, professors, and other citizens to leave the country permanently, in fear of imprisonment and other penalties and harassment. Others left because of the deteriorating economic situation in the country. New Egyptian communities began forming on the margins of many capitals, such as Berlin and Paris.

Through participant observation, I conducted my fieldwork between Berlin and Paris. I was trying to understand how members of the Egyptian diaspora community make sense of their everyday lives. I argue that the Egyptian state has used passports and citizenship in order to dismantle the political movement following 2011. Diaspora Egyptians, however, are resisting the overwhelming power of the state by performing their own version of national identity in their everyday lives.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background: Egypt's revolution and Egyptian exiles in Europe

In 2011, Egyptians were among the many peoples of Arab countries who rose up against their autocratic governments in hopes of change. They succeeded briefly in ending sixty years of military rule over the country. The revolution rapidly escalated to its own end, with the 2013 coup resulting in military control of the country once again. Human rights violations are at a record high under the current presidency of Abdelfattah ElSisi, as documented by human rights organizations. Social conflict resulting from the coup has displaced many Egyptian citizens, both within state borders (Mabrouk 2017) and outside of them (Trager 2016).

Many young Egyptians who participated in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and continued their activism afterwards were arrested and jailed, while others managed to flee the country. Those who escaped the country in fear of prosecution have recently begun forming small communities on the margins of their host societies. These communities are complemented by a growing wave of immigration from Egypt due to the abysmal economic situation.

While the existence of a modern Egyptian diaspora has been debated in the past (Severo and Zuolo 2012), the developments since Egypt's 2011 revolution have definitely revived the discussion. Modern Egyptian diaspora communities have engaged in many levels of organizing; either via traditional structures, such as non-governmental organizations advocating for human rights in Egypt or via modern structures, such as social media groups. In addition, these communities carry out a range of social and political activities that can be described as *diasporic*.

It is difficult to obtain reliable quantitative data about the number of Egyptians who left Egypt for economic reasons, in contrast to those who fled the political regime. (Hamzawy and Dunne 2019) used data on Egyptian immigration to reach a general conclusion that “there is quantitative and anecdotal evidence of significant increases in emigration since 2011 and particularly since 2013.” They then used qualitative data to reach the conclusion that there is a major trend of “politically motivated immigration” in Egypt post-2013.

There have been two major waves of politically motivated immigration from Egypt. The first directly followed the 2013 coup, and consisted primarily of Islamist activists and those associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, which had ruled Egypt under president Mohamed Morsi before the coup; the majority fled to Qatar and Turkey. The second wave started in 2014, consisting of “young activists, writers, intellectuals, artists, and journalists” who “mostly [headed] for European capitals, such as London and Berlin, as well as Canada and the United States.” (Hamzawy and Dunne 2019)

There is a dearth of academic writings on the Egyptian diaspora in general and on the post-2013 diaspora specifically. I was unable to find any literature discussing the phenomenon with the exception of a paper (Hamzawy and Dunne) and a book (Haggag 2016). Haggag's book features interviews with Egyptians who had been subjected to what he calls "involuntary departure" from Egypt.

Having a look at any statistics for Egyptian living in Germany over the years (figure 1) or Egyptian asylum seekers in Germany (figure 2) will only come to confirm the phenomena.

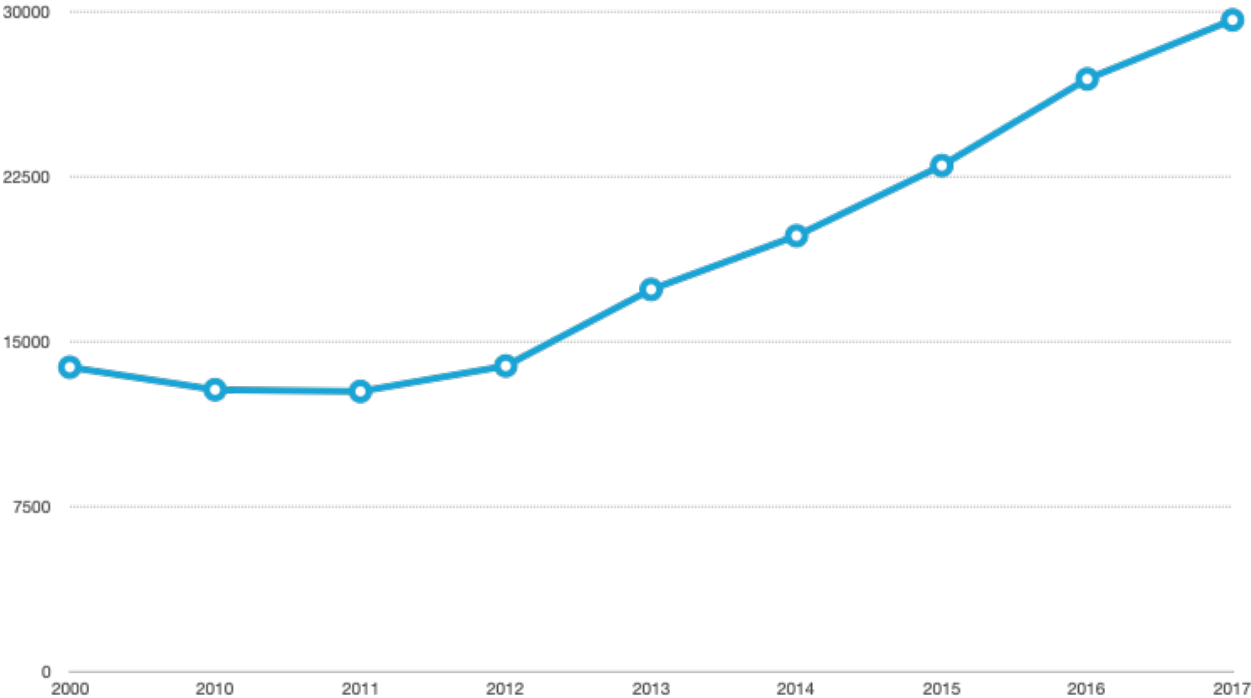


Figure 1: Egyptian Immigrants in Germany from the years 2000, 2010:2017 (Weißköppel ,205)

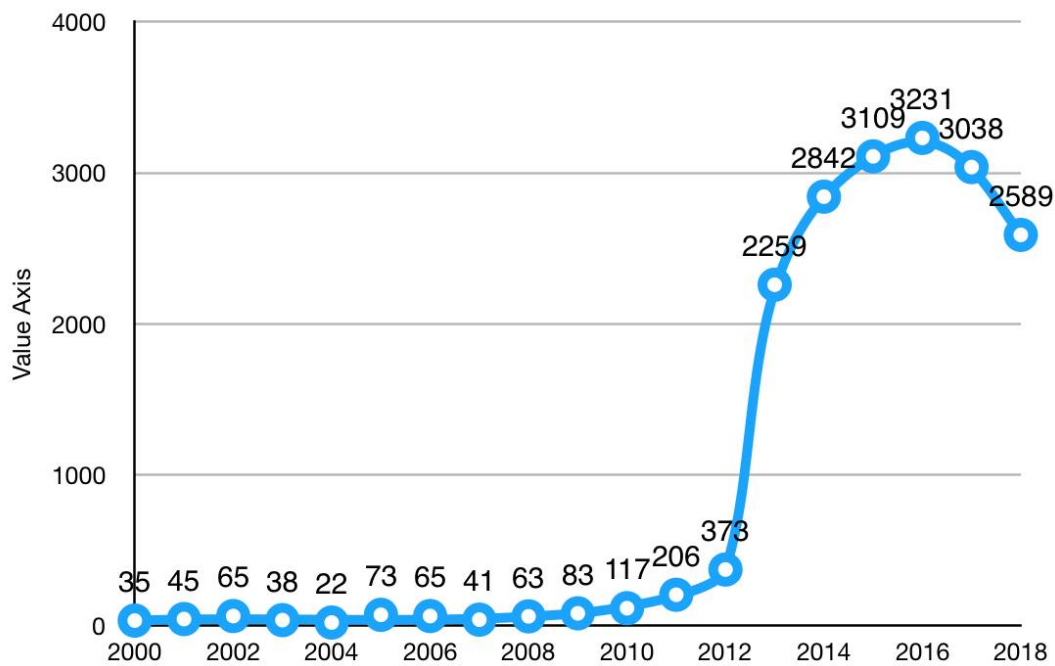


Figure 2: Egyptian asylum seekers in Germany (UNCHR, n.d)

(Müller-Funk 2019) attempts to follow the waves of emigration that resulted in the Egyptian diaspora community in Europe, in order to understand the Egyptian diaspora. He finds out that the diaspora, he discovers, was created by three major waves. The first wave was politically motivated emigration after 1950; the second was economically motivated emigration during the 1970s and 1980s; and finally, the third was irregular emigration during the 1990s and 2000s. Although the reasons behind these three waves vary, Müller-Funk argues for the existence of the Egyptian diaspora. A shared Egyptian identity unifies this very diverse community.

The timeframe of Müller-Funk's study ended in 2013, and since then, there have been many changes in Egypt's diaspora community in Europe. Perhaps the most notable of these changes is the language used by the community to describe itself. In Paris and Vienna, Müller-Funk noticed that Egyptian immigrants never identified themselves as diaspora, *šatāt*, or exiled, *manfa*. Yet throughout the course of my fieldwork in Paris and Berlin, many of my informants referred to their community as a diaspora. In addition, many news organizations have begun adopting the term (Barker 2019). This important shift in language is likely attributable to the most recent wave of politically motivated immigration starting in 2013.

1.2 Overview of the thesis

In this thesis, I will reflect upon my five months of fieldwork with Egyptian diaspora communities in Paris and Berlin, during which I engaged in participant observation using a camera as an ethnographic tool. At times in this paper, I will analyze the diaspora as it is reflected in my film (Tell Mody) and the filming process; while at other times, I will provide additional analysis and context.

In this first chapter, I will provide an overview of the thesis, explaining the general premises that I considered during writing. I will discuss the context of the study and the motivations behind it. I will also provide necessary historical context about Egypt when describing the current situation of the diaspora.

The second chapter discusses methodology. I will talk about the data collecting method and the implementation of reflexivity and participant observation. I will also briefly discuss the anthropology of resistance.

The third chapter provides the theoretical approach of the study. Which theories were used to analyze and understand empirical evidence? I explain them briefly and attempt to contextualize them within the framework of this study.

The fourth chapter discusses Egyptian citizenship and passports as tools used by the Egyptian government to express its power over the bodies of Egyptian citizens.

The fifth chapter discusses one of the limitations that I faced during my fieldwork. This limitation is the disputed ability of visual ethnography to provide knowledge that challenges the existing power structures in a given society. I argue that the camera is able to provide empirical evidence, even when it is not recording.

The sixth and seventh chapters discuss national identity and resistance, arguing that members of the Egyptian diaspora perform a particular kind of national identity in the course of everyday life as an act of resistance. I give examples of different modes of resistance from my fieldwork..

Finally, the eighth chapter concludes this project. I summarize what this project has achieved and what it has failed to achieve and why.

The thesis is followed by a list of the works cited. I am using APA 6th style in citation throughout the thesis.

In all examples based on my fieldwork, I have changed the names of my informants for anonymity and safety reasons.

1.3 Motivation

In August 2015, I took a flight from the Cairo airport to Oslo. It was not the first time in my life to leave Egypt. As my flight took off, I was able to see the crowded streets of Cairo getting smaller and smaller. This time was different, I felt, because it may be the last time I ever see the cityscape of Cairo again.

I was arrested in 2014 for my student activism promoting academic freedoms, making me one of 40,000 Egyptian political prisoners following the 2013 military coup (Human Rights Watch 2015). With my safety jeopardized by many threats, I was forced to take the first opportunity I could to leave Egypt.

After finishing three years of study in Norway, I was still in limbo regarding my situation. The Egyptian embassy's refusal to renew my passport made my situation even more dire and uncertain. I realized that I could not return to Egypt so long as the current regime was still ruling the country. Yet I had no idea what the future will hold. Should I plan to live in exile forever? Should I expect a more relaxed situation in Egypt soon, making my return possible?

I found myself very depressed about the fact that I may never return to my home country. I also found myself very attached to my Egyptian national identity, resisting the idea of holding a different passport or travel document from another country. Although I was relatively safer in Norway, I felt devastated by the power of the Egyptian state over me. Amid a situation replete with uncertainties, I started this project: an ethnographic study examining the Egyptian diaspora in Europe. I wanted to understand what it means to be an exiled Egyptian. What does national identity mean to us? And what do we make of it?

I began the project by studying what the meaning of *diaspora*, trying to understand the anthropological arguments around the phenomenon. Later, I developed an interest in citizenship as a legal concept, as I wanted to understand the relation between formal identification documents (such as passports and identity cards) and national identity in the context of the diaspora. I also wanted to observe and analyze how Egyptian diaspora communities perform their national identity and why.

When completing my fieldwork and working on the film, I discovered a link tying all of these issues together. This link is the power- resistance relationship between citizens and their government. By power, I'm referring to (Foucault 1990). I will use Foucault's writings to explain the power- resistance relationship between Egyptian diaspora communities and the governments of their home and host countries. This will be elaborated upon in the third chapter on my theoretical approach.

I was questioning my own identity when I started this project. I wanted to know what it meant to be an exiled Egyptian, so naturally I was drawn towards studying other Egyptians who live in exile. My fieldwork was an attempt to answer the question: **How do exiled Egyptian nationals in Berlin and Paris make sense of their everyday lives?**

1.4 Fieldwork: The setting and time frame

This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Berlin and Paris between April and August 2019. Most of my informants are persons forced to flee Egypt, belonging to two different generations: those who fled the country in the 1950s and those who fled after the military coup in 2013.

As explained earlier, I have a complicated and deeply personal relationship with the subject matter of my thesis. Therefore, this project can be considered as *anthropology at home* (Peirano 1998). This project can be also considered as *activist research* (Hale 2001). I used reflexivity to approach my fieldwork. I used my *ethnographic self* as well to analyze the Egyptian diaspora communities in Berlin and Paris. I will discuss this in more detail in the second chapter on methodology.

2 Methodology

The project mobilizes the use of cameras as an ethnographic tool to collect data. In this chapter, I will explain the methodology upon which I relied for this project.

2.1 Data collection methods

Participant observation was implemented as a main research method for this project. I conducted participant observation with a camera for most of my fieldwork. In Berlin, I spent the majority of my time with two activists in their thirties who left Egypt in 2015 and 2017. They used to hang out in a bar near the center of Berlin; I usually recorded this setting. I often initiated the conversation and asked questions related to my research when there was a long gap of silence or they were preoccupied by their phones. These open conversations do not qualify as traditional or formal interviews, as they were more personal and friendly in tone than an interview. I directed the conversation many times, although sometimes they would already be discussing a topic.

In addition to open conversation, I followed and filmed the activities of my informants in Berlin and Paris throughout the course of their everyday lives. I will analyze the elements of this filmed material; the main part of the empirical chapters will analyze the activities recorded by the camera.

Interviews were also used sometimes, as it was difficult to find visual evidence regarding certain events from the past, such as the 2011 Egyptian revolution or memories from the homeland.

2.2 Reflexivity

In addition to being an anthropology student, I am also an exiled Egyptian activist. This greatly facilitates my access to the informants and it positions me very close to the subject of my thesis. My previous assumptions and personal experiences may hinder me from approaching this study with a fresh or detached viewpoint. On the other hand, perhaps my closeness to the situation will prevent me from falling into the stereotypes or false assumptions that are prone to being derived

from a privileged position. I further believe that my personal involvement in my subject of study will enable me to provide unique insights and analysis that could not be provided by someone who has not directly experienced living in the Egyptian diaspora community.

My approach towards this dilemma was to practice reflexivity in order to acknowledge what is etic and what is mic in this research. As (Davies 2008) explains, reflexivity does not pretend that the researcher does not exist but rather, it acknowledges the fact that the researcher does exist; attempting to address their own experience as part of the ethnographic research process.

2.3 The ethnographic self

I have used what is called the *ethnographic self* as a resource for this project. I will address my own narrative and experience and I will contrast it with my informants' experiences. (Collins and Gallinat 2010) argue that the usage of *self* as a resource is necessary to engaging the field in a humanistic way. He explains that the use of self, story, memory, and dialogue is important for ethnography. Yet he also underscores the role of memories in reshaping our experience of reality, thus it is crucial to utilize reflexivity alongside the *self*.

(Davies 2008) agrees, as she asserts that the use of autobiography “simply recognized that ethnographic knowledge is in part a product of the social situation of ethnographers and that this must be acknowledged and its significance addressed during analysis....” Therefore, as an Egyptian myself, my firsthand knowledge of Egypt is utilized and recognized as a part of the project. I will attempt to be as clear as possible in regards to what belongs to me, and what belongs to my informants.

2.4 Anthropology at home

Although my fieldwork for this project lasted for six months in 2019, I have been engaged with my fieldwork for my entire life. As an Egyptian, I have experienced the Egyptian identity for my entire life. And while the situation in northern Norway, where I live, may differ from Paris or Berlin, we can still call this project *anthropology at home*.

(Peirano 1998) explains the history and context of anthropology at home. An array of approaches – ethnic, cultural, geographic, and linguistic- were taken by scholars towards anthropology at home. I share many characteristics with my informants; for instance, my informants and I -in most cases- considered our current homes as temporary until we could return to Egypt. Based on my experience, I believe most of my informants did not consider me an outsider. My camera, however, was considered an outsider, as I will elaborate on that in a later chapter.

Nevertheless, the need to address what is my own experience versus what is my informants' experience still stands out. And while I disagree with radical approaches such as “*nativist ethnography*,” which claims that only natives can understand natives (Peirano 1998), I do believe that doing anthropology at home has certain benefits when it comes to analysis.

At the same time, my personal bias may have affected the research since in most cases I had full power over translation. I faced many problems translating Egyptian Arabic to English. Sometimes I had to choose between underscoring a certain metaphor or choosing a clearer translation. I translated what served my analysis better. This is why the film is important for this project: it saved some of my informants' dialogues from this bias (although only for Arabic-speaking audiences of course). I do my best to accurately translate the quotes taken for this analysis; however, the reader needs to understand that it is still my own translation.

Utilizing what (Hale 2001) calls *activist research*, I will argue that my close position to my fieldwork does not contradict the scientific nature of this study. On the contrary, it has often enabled me to reach better understanding and analysis.

2.5 The use of Camera

Visual evidence provided by the camera -both in the film and in the material that didn't make it to the final cut- played a major role in my analysis. The camera itself was also vital to my analysis. I will argue that the camera, as an ethnographic tool, can generate knowledge even when it is not recording. I will reflect more on this in a later chapter.

During the fieldwork, there were some concerns from informants who did not want to be filmed violating social norms, like drinking alcohol. Therefore, the camera didn't have access to many

conversations. My notes and memories of conversations and contexts were used in that regard, as explained above in using the *ethnographic self*. The camera was however present many times, capturing some aspects of my informants' daily lives. This visual evidence will provide analysis in both the film and the text.

2.6 The use of history

This project also uses historical data to situate my informants in the appropriate historical context. I refer mainly to (Fahmy 2002) in addition to some legislations, in order to contextualize the Egyptian diaspora. Historical data has helped me analyze the Egyptian diaspora as an act of power practiced by the Egyptian state.

2.7 Ethical considerations

There were many ethical challenges regarding this project. First, some of my informants are my friends, or at least knew me from before. This created problems with data collection; rendering it difficult to determine which information they told me in confidence and which could be used for my research. I addressed this challenge by being open about my research; I explained the project to all informants at the beginning. When I felt they are saying something in confidence, I reminded them of the project and my usage of this dialogues.

The camera's presence also played a role in confirming the purpose of my presence. No one had a problem with me taking notes but there were some situations where my informants refused to be filmed. At other times, they allowed me to record but they told me not to use the material in any public viewing.

I treated the material as carefully as possible, following the Norwegian Centre for Research Data's guidelines about data safety.

There was also an issue regarding a potential security risk to informants if they are shown on film. For this reason, all informants appearing in the public version of the film cannot return to Egypt anyways, as they are already being prosecuted there for other matters. The viewer should be aware of this limitation.

3 Theoretical approach

In this chapter, I will briefly describe my fieldwork in addition to laying down the theoretical approach used in my analysis. I will introduce the theories of my choice and provide some insights regarding the literature related to the project question.

3.1 Context: Berlin and Paris

For the majority of my time conducting fieldwork, I stayed in Berlin, where I met with many Egyptians. The Network of Egyptians living abroad is complex and diverse, not only across Berlin but also across Europe. During my stay in Berlin, for instance, I met Egyptians who were visiting the city. I met with Egyptian residents of Sweden, the Netherlands, the UK, Turkey, France, and the Czech Republic. The relationships that they form vary from friendship to more or less intimate relations. Most of my informants have led me to each other through each of their social circles. All the Egyptians I met had moved to Berlin within the past five years.

I recognize two different categories of Egyptians I met in Berlin. The first consists of political activists, human rights defenders, and others who are essentially exiled, as they do not return to Egypt even for a visit, citing security fears. They had usually been forced to leave Egypt against their will. The second category are those who had chosen to start a new life in Germany, escaping a bad economic environment or seeking a better education. They usually maintained a relation with Egypt, visiting it at least once a year.

Most of the people who I met were young, between 20 and 35 years old. Both categories of Egyptians in Berlin shared many features: such as wanting to return home permanently if the situation were to change (even though some of them think it is impossible to see that change happening during their lifetimes). Those who cannot return to Egypt held higher hopes for the situation to change than did their peers who return to Egypt regularly. Yet it is important to note that both categories of Egyptians had different ideas regarding what the change is that they are expecting or hoping to see.

Both categories of Egyptians in Berlin – the exiled and those who return regularly - shared many common places and worked together. Although individuals usually did social activities with their peers who fell within the same category, there were many interrelations between the two social circles. Friendship or professional relations tied the Egyptian people together in a complicated network, not only in Berlin but also throughout Europe. For instance, Egyptians in Europe planned and executed a human rights campaign in three European cities simultaneously, with the participation of Egyptians living in five European cities. The organization of the campaign relied heavily on this network, which also included NGOs and activists of other nationalities.

Of course, there were Egyptians living in Berlin who I did not meet during the course of my fieldwork; I did not meet diplomats, for example. I underscore that I'm only drawing a picture of my informants, thus of my data sample, not of Egyptians in Berlin in general.

In Paris, I met with Egyptians who fit into the previous two categories of either exiles or regular returnees who left Egypt for better educational or professional opportunities. I also met with two elderly Marxist authors, who had escaped similar conditions under the military government that ruled Egypt starting from 1952. Since both had acquired French citizenship and had moved to France under different circumstances, I could not categorize them the same as the Egyptians who are relatively new in Europe.

I also noticed a substantial difference in the Marxist authors' relations to their homeland and their visions about their identities, a difference that I found qualified them for their own category. For instance, they considered themselves to be Egyptian/French, with dual identities. when that is an option. In a restaurant, if the waiter spoke in French but looked Middle Eastern, I observed my informants would first try speaking to the waiter in Arabic. I will address the expression of Egyptian identity in greater detail in the discussion chapters.

Short note on the terminology

I found the terms and definitions related to the diaspora ambiguous and somewhat impractical to use. For instance, (Hamzawy and Dunne 2019) described those who have fled from Egypt and cannot return as “politically motivated immigrants.” This implies that there was a degree of choice in the process of immigration. I also found the terms “refugee” and “asylum seekers” to be misleading when describing Egyptians who left to escape repression, since these terms are

specifically legal terms that refer to legalizing your stay in a country. Using these terms would disregard the majority of my data samples, who have different legal reasons to stay in the country.

(Haggag 2016) provides detailed interviews with people who left Egypt post 2011, referring to them as part of the third “*taghreebah*” an Arabic term derived from the word for “alien,” which can roughly be translated to “exodus.” He excuses his word choice by saying, “They were forced to be alienated from Egypt.” Haggag also uses the word “involuntary immigration” to describe the act itself.

While “*taghreebah*” may be useful here, Haggag’s theory lacks any sort of empirical evidence regarding his description of the three waves of “*Taghreebah*” throughout the modern history of Egypt. At the same time, empirical evidence from my fieldwork contradicts many details in his theory. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term “exiled” to differentiate those escaping oppression who cannot return even for visits. I’ll refer to the exiled along with other Egyptians in the community as the Egyptian diaspora, or the diaspora community.

3.2 The Egyptian diaspora: Theoretical framework

There are important questions to answer before continuing this discussion. What is a diaspora? What defines an exiled person? It’s also important to set the terminology used in both this thesis and in the literature before going any further into the discussion about the diaspora.

(Safran 1991) can serve as an entry to the debate around the definition of diaspora. Safran criticized the academia of his day for neglecting diasporas in their studies on nationalism and ethnonationalism. He praised the use of the term “diaspora communities,” as it differentiates modern diasporas from the Jewish Diaspora. Nevertheless, he argued that scholars are basing their studies on a very broad definition of diaspora. He suggested that a minority community can be called a diaspora when it shares some or all of six characteristics, which are:

“1) They, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions;

- 2) They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements;
- 3) They believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
- 4) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return- when conditions are appropriate;
- 5) They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
- 6) They continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (Safran 1991)."

While Safran's six characteristics are true regarding some of my informants, many of my informants lacked at least one of these six characteristics. The empirical evidence from my fieldwork shows many people who consider themselves as part of a bigger community of immigrants in Europe who do not have anything in common except for being Egyptian. Some spend most of their time online reading news about Egypt and they prefer to spend their time with other Egyptians. They also display their national identity on some occasions, for example, by wearing the Egyptian national flag as a cape during football matches.

While it is easy to dismiss economic immigrants as not being part of a diaspora, all of my informants told me that they would prefer to stay in Egypt - even for a lower salary - but current salaries in Egypt "can only help you escape the poverty line." Many of my informants told me that even though they chose to leave Egypt, they feel that they were forced to. One informant was saving money for his marriage for five years after graduating university. When the Egyptian government decided to change the currency exchange rate system to the floating exchange rate, he felt he had no choice but to leave Egypt: "My savings decreased 50% in value in a few days, and the dream of getting married became impossible. So I had to leave."

This same informant underscored that he felt better in Egypt:

“I go outside and hang out with other Egyptian friends a lot. I also attend a lot of parties and social events with Egyptians. I don't prefer to be alone. When I'm alone I think about my family and the people who I miss in Egypt.”

His words make it obvious that he didn't just freely choose to leave Egypt to seek a better life, but felt he was forced to do so, carrying out what can be seen as diasporic activities.

(Clifford 1994) discusses the problem of defining a diaspora, arguing that there are many diasporic activities in our contemporary world that cannot be covered by narrow definitions limiting the diaspora to the nation-states, which he sees as an epiphenomenon of capitalism. He criticized Safran for focusing on Jews who were entitled when it comes to the language used around the diaspora. He also criticized Safran for setting out, with his six characteristics, what can be called an ideal type of the diaspora when in fact, the reality is more complex.

In my opinion, the Egyptian community in Berlin and Paris does qualify to be called a diaspora, despite empirical evidence showing a variety of experiences and relationships to the homeland unique to each individual.

There are many ways to define a diaspora, through ethnic claims, nation-states, and the utopic/dystopic views held by the community towards homeland (Clifford 1994). The best approach to defining the Egyptian diaspora, as I will argue in my analysis, is the power and resistance approach. The only feature shared by all my informants was the fact that the Egyptian state's power structures are still affecting and interfering with their everyday lives. In addition, they display and practice a specific Egyptian identity as an expression of resistance to the situation they ended up in.

In this study, I will focus on the power structures in both the homeland and the host community. It is worth noting that all six features of a diaspora described by Safran are a display of power and resistance. There's a power structure that has displaced the Egyptians in this diaspora, and they are practicing resistance in many forms - such as retaining their language and culture, maintaining relations with their homeland, and hoping to return.

Clifford's description of diaspora can also fit within the contextualization of diaspora as an interplay between power and resistance. What are the sources of these utopic and dystopic views? We can see these utopic/dystopic views towards the homeland as a form of knowledge: knowledge formed through governmentality, according to (Foucault 2007). For Foucault, governmentality is the organized practices (mentalities, rationalities, and methods) under which subjects are governed. This knowledge displayed here is the result of power and resistance practices.

(Foucault 1990) contends that the way in which we understand power has been fundamentally changed in the modern age. The modern state's application of discipline and punishment has shifted throughout the course of history: from direct violence to psychological power. To illustrate his concept of power, Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor: a prison where all cells are exposed to a central watchtower, and the soldier in the watchtower can theoretically see every single cell at any given time. Yet, the people inside the cells cannot do the same. Because they can be watched at any given moment, Foucault asserts, the people in the cells strive to behave at all times.

State power works in a similar way. It controls the imagination and thoughts of citizens through a subtly distributed power, creating what can be called a normalizing power. The normalizing power compels persons within a given society to all behave in a similar way, in order to appeal to what is normal.

I found Foucault's concept of power to be applicable to Egypt's diaspora community, especially for those who do not return to Egypt at all. Those who left Egypt post-2013 have been recently freed – in theory - from the state power structures governing their existence in Egypt. In other words, the normal to which they were forced to appeal in Egypt did not exist in the same form anymore, because they simply have moved outside the Egyptian borders, therefore, their bodies are outside the control of the Egyptian state. It was interesting to observe and analyze the extent to which state power was still effective in influencing the behavior of Egyptians in the diaspora, and in which ways. How does this power affect the everyday lives of my informants?

It is also important to analyze the direct power used by the Egyptian state to force its citizens to leave their own country. The fact that most of my informants left the country against their will because of the political regime cannot be ignored. The government was able to literally control

their bodies and ban them from the country. Bio-power, a term used by (Foucault 2007) is applicable here; defined as “namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power.” I have used the concept of biopower to analyze the Egyptian government's practice of exiling its citizens, as I will discuss in a later chapter.

Foucault's portrayal of power has been often criticized as this vast structure without giving individuals -who are both subject and object at the same time according to him- any chance or room for resisting or negotiating this power (Fahmy 2002). Later works of Foucault definitely developed to focus on resistance, as exemplified in (Foucault 1978) 's famous quote “Where there is power, there is resistance.” Yet (Ortner 2016) notes that ethnographic research in general often references the early works of Foucault when analyzing the oppressed under neoliberalism.

Ortner criticizes what American anthropologists call *dark anthropology*, which describes and analyzes the harsh situations that individuals may find themselves in under neoliberalism. She notes the importance of this work in some aspects, but underscores that it cannot be the ultimate goal of anthropological studies to simply analyze oppression under neoliberalism without exploring resistance. (Ortner 2016) wonders “What is the point of opposing neoliberalism if we cannot imagine better ways of living and better futures? How can we be both realistic about the ugly realities of the world today and hopeful about the possibilities of changing them? She proposes what she considers to be a different kind of anthropology: “the anthropology of critique, resistance, and activism.”

The *anthropology of resistance* “covers a range of modes of (anthropological) engagement with political issues.” One of these modes is *activist research*, which is “research conducted in the course of being personally engaged in the political struggle under study” (Ortner 2016). She referred to (Hale 2001), who defined *activist research* based on four elements:

“a.) helps us better to understand the root causes of inequality, oppression, violence and related conditions of human suffering;

b.) is carried out, at each phase from conception through dissemination, in direct cooperation with an organized collective of people who themselves are subject to these conditions;

c.) is used, together with the people in question, to formulate strategies for transforming these conditions and to achieve the power necessary to make these strategies effective" (Hale 2001).

This definition of activist research cannot be applied fully to this project, as I was not cooperating with my informants in all the stages; rather, I tried to include them in different phases, discussing my findings with them sometimes. This is also the case with the film part of my project – I did not include my informants in all stages of the filming. Instead, I tried to show my informants different versions of the film before the final cut.

I believe carrying out the research project entirely – at all stages - with my informants would have posed many practical difficulties. In addition, in the ethnographic context, if I were to claim to carry out this project entirely in collaboration with my informants, I would be ignoring the power relationships between participants, and between myself and the participants. The idea of a collective project would suggest that the outcome of the project is representative of all participants; yet the reality is that some participants had more power over the narrative than others. Including informants is essential for any ethnographic study, but the limitations around this inclusion must be acknowledged.

Yet what I find more important about (Hale 2001) is his assertion that researchers committing to solving a particular economic, social, or political issue does not detract from their scientific research on the issue; and not only that, it gives the researcher a better understanding of the subject. In the case of this project, this was proven to be true. In the ethnographical context, access is an essential part of the research. My sharing of a similar political view or a similar situation with my informants evoked empathy towards me and the project. Therefore, access was facilitated for me. For instance, when I was recording Egyptians gathered to watch a football match for an Egyptian team, I met many people who I didn't know. When I introduced myself and my project, and asked for their consent to be recorded, some of them consented using phrases referring to my identity, such as "Yes, anything for an Egyptian fellow."

In a later chapter, I will explain how this access allowed me to explore another mode of ethnographic observation, which I didn't plan for, using the camera. The use of the camera enabled me to better analyze my informants' strategies of resistance.

In this study, I try to go beyond analyzing the effects of power structures on the diaspora community to describe and analyze resistance strategies by the diaspora, focusing on the performance of a specific type of national identity as a resistance strategy. When discussing performance, I utilize the theory of (Goffman 1999) on social performing. I also rely upon Goffman's dramaturgical model of social life in my analysis. The following will be an introduction to essential terms used in this theory.

As Goffman sees, social interaction can be compared to a theater. Individuals in regular daily life are actors on a stage, each playing an assortment of roles. The audience is comprised of others who watch the role-playing and respond to the performance. In social interaction, as in dramatic performance, there is a 'front stage' locale where the actors are in front of an audience. The actors' consciousness of that audience and the audience's desires for the roles the actors should play impact the on-screen characters' conduct.

Likewise, there is a 'backstage,' where people can unwind, act naturally, and stop performing the role or character that they play when they are in front of others, expressing a more comfortable identity (Goffman 1999). In other words, people put on masks all the time. These masks contribute to determining their actions and reactions, in addition to determining the expectations of the audiences who may be, at the same time, other actors.

Goffman uses the term 'performance' to introduce all the actions and reactions of a person in front of a specific arrangement of observers, or audience. The actor doesn't necessarily have to be aware of their performance; yet regardless, the audience is attributing meaning to the performance and the actor all the time.

Goffman's theory has provided the framework in which I will analyze the empirical data collected from my fieldwork, both the data from the recorded videos and from my notes and memory.

4 The history of Egyptian nationalism and the exile

This chapter will explore the origins of Egyptian national identity – through the history of passports and exile as punishment - together with their functions in current times.

Exile as punishment has always been used by the Egyptian state. In this regard, we can read modern Egyptian history by following the history of these punishments.

Egypt is one of the oldest countries in the world. Throughout history, Egypt was more or less able to maintain its same borders. Many historians believe that the founding of modern Egypt as a nation-state was in 1805, with Muhammad Ali rising to power under public pressure and demonstrations to replace the Ottoman viceroy. Egyptian national identity started to appear, mixed with Arabic nationalism, in contrast with the Turkish identity also appearing at this time. On paper, the Ottomans had ruled Egypt until World War II, but in practice, Mohamed Ali, and his family after him, took control of the country over a century earlier.

The famous nationalistic slogan “Muhammad Ali, the founder of modern Egypt” has been criticized as a Eurocentric idea. In a sense, it attributes the modernization of Egypt to European experts hired by Ali to help him reform the country. (Fahmy 2002) argues that the significance of Ali’s rule went beyond that. Aside from the superficial Eurocentric take, the period under Muhammad Ali witnessed the formation of the greater power distribution of Egypt as a nation-state.

It was in this period that Egypt transformed, in many regards, towards the (Foucault 1990) model of effective modern authority according to (Fahmy 2002). In this model, the government aims to control the thoughts and minds of the people through knowledge. Muhammed Ali's rule was also the period when Egyptian national army was formed. It is no coincidence, (Fahmy 2002) theory explains why it is not a coincidence that the army has actually been in control of the country since 1952, with the exception of a short time period following the revolution of 2011.

4.1 The invention of the passport

(Torpey 2018) provides historical analysis on the passport - its invention, the legislation on it in Western countries, and the development of the passport into a means for the state to monopolize the means of movement, especially between international borders. Since the French revolution, the passport has become “essential to states’ monopolization of the legitimate ‘means of movement....’ ”

Torpey explains how ID documents represent vast power, as governments rely on them in order to identify and categorize citizens. Yet while his book introduction claims to provide “a detailed history of the modern passport...in the modern world,” the publisher forgot to mention that by modern he means “Western” as the book features cases from Europe and North America. Even when African or third world countries are mentioned, they are often mentioned as a part of a European colonizing power, ignoring the history before and after colonialism.

The invention of the passport along with the first Egyptian census was carried out during Mohamed Ali’s era. The census referred to Egyptian nationals as “*Inside the government*” and foreigners were called “*Outside the government*” (Fahmy 2016). The census aimed to count Egyptian citizens in order to expand state authority over them; for example, by sending men into compulsory military service and collecting taxes as well (Fahmy 2002).

Fahmy believes that the census has significantly contributed to putting the foundation of Egyptian national identity before the concept of citizenship and the invention of personal identification documents. The first form of what we can see evolving to become the passport was called *tezkere*. As (Fahmy 2002) explains, the *tezkere* was a stamped piece of paper that soldiers had to carry with them, which stated the time period and reason for which they had left the camp. This paper did not function to affirm national belonging. Syrian workers in Egypt were required to carry such a *tezkere* to allow the authorities to identify and punish them if they did something wrong. To prevent peasants from escaping military service, travelers from the countryside were required to show “*tezkere*” to enter Cairo. It was fascinating to know that people were escaping the government to the capital, where the power is more effective, but they can dissolve into the crowds. I recall my last few months in Egypt in this context when I did the exact same thing until I can arrange for my departure from Egypt. I left my city of Alexandria to Cairo. Before I entered

Cairo there were checkpoints. Police forces stopped busses and cars to check their licenses. They also choose some random passengers and ask them for their Identification. They checked if you are wanted by the state over their radio. luckily I was not chosen for this random check. as the random sample was not really random but targeted those who looked poor.

Ali's surveillance system aimed to normalize following orders amongst the soldiers in more subtle ways instead of through the use of excessive brutal force. As Foucault would put it, surveillance represented "a shift from spectacular to representational and finally to disciplinary punishment" (Fahmy 2002). The passport then served as a tool of surveillance similar to the panopticon from Foucault.

4.2 Exile as a punishment

Expelling Egyptian peasants and sending them away from their villages was also implemented by the Egyptian state during this period as a form of punishment. The peasants' law determined many crimes - such as tax evasion and vandalism - for which peasants could be sent to distant prisons to perform hard labor (Fahmy 2002). Other than that, the Egyptian government did not send people outside Egypt as a form of punishment, with the exception of foreigners. (Fahmy 2016) actually notes that sending away from Egypt was one of the earliest ways the Egyptian state separated Egyptians from foreigners and helped the formation of Egyptian national identity before citizenship became a norm.

Exiling Egyptians to outside Egypt may have started in 1882 with the British colonizer taking control of the country. Ahmed 'Urabi and other leaders of the 1882 revolution were sentenced to be exiled to what is now the island of Sri-Lanka, after being defeated by the British army.

Later the British colonial authorities sentenced Saa'd Zaghoul and other national political leaders to exile in Malta amid the Egyptian revolution of 1919. Zaghoul was exiled, and advocated for the independence of Egypt in different European countries, until he was allowed to return in 1923.

The Egyptian constitution of 1923 paid attention to this practice, stating clearly in its sixth article: "It is not permissible to remove an Egyptian from Egyptian homes, and it is not

permissible for an Egyptian to be prohibited from residing in any place nor to be required to reside in a specific place except in the cases specified in the law" (Fuad I of Egypt 1923).

Given the context of all the above mentioned cases of exile, it becomes obvious that exile here was used by the state as a method of controlling society in response to a popular uprising. Exile aimed to control the bodies of persons in Egypt, to serve a political strategy. State power here took a more subtle form than the usual public executions of rebellion leaders, which may have incited more public anger. Exile represented an ideal strategy for the state to get rid of these political leaders without expressing direct excessive power.

It is also worth noting that both Sri-Lanka and Malta were under British colonial rule as well at these times. Therefore, exile did not mean that the person's body will no longer be under the surveillance of the state authority. It only meant that he will no longer be effective at a local level.

Exiling simply aims to dismantle the social network of a political movement. By sending people abroad, the government guarantees that they will no longer be effective in the political equation. We can borrow elements from Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to explain what is happening in practice on an individual level. For Bourdieu, societies are represented in different *fields* in which social actors interact and exchange *capital*, which can be economic, social, or cultural capital (O'Hara 2000).

When a person leaves a country, much of this capital cannot be used, mostly social and cultural capital, which are most effective in the political movement. Most of a person's cultural capital becomes useless in the host society. It's as if they traveled to a new country and cannot use their foreign currency. In other words, the practice of exiling aims to punish political actors by stripping them of their effectiveness in a subtle way -achieving Foucault's theory of power.

4.3 Post-colonial Egypt

While using exile as a punishment for political opponents had officially stopped following the revolution of 1919 and the constitution of 1923, the practice returned in post-colonial Egypt. The Egyptian king was sent into exile as the army declared the first republic in 1952.

The army's republic was not less oppressive than the rule of the colonizer. Under military rule, Egyptian Jews were sent away. With the formation of Israel and hate speech against Jews, many Egyptian Jews left the country to Israel. One of my informants in Paris came from a Jewish family. He was still very young when his family chose to sell everything and leave to Israel. His Marxist ideology prevented him from following his family. He converted to Islam, because, as he puts it "It wasn't about religion, it was about my identity, whether I wanted to be Egyptian or not."

This informant would later be arrested and sent to jail for a few years for his Marxist activism before he managed to escape Egypt to Paris during the 1960s. He was not able to return to Egypt until after he acquired French citizenship. He returned to Egypt for a few visits over his lifetime, but considered Paris to be his homebase.

Escaping from the same government, the Egyptian novelist Waguih Ghali (1929? – 1969) wrote in his diaries that he was trying to renew his immigrant passport in Germany when he was advised to try to get an Egyptian passport instead, "...to which he laughed, "You're joking." It was known that the Egyptian government refused to renew his passport due to his "political views"(El Gibaly 2017). The state therefore relied on the new international legal framework, which doesn't allow people to travel without a passport. Those who escaped the state can now expect to face some difficult times with identification papers, and if they cannot overcome these challenges, they will have to return to Egypt. The passport then was a tool to expand the state's power over citizens' bodies outside the border.

4.4 Practicing power through passports

Fieldwork data proves that the same tactic is still implemented by the Egyptian government through its embassies. Salem, who lives in Istanbul but visits Paris often to attend events related to his human rights work, told me that he had got a call from a friend to leave Egypt immediately because otherwise he would be arrested the next day. Salem had to leave Egypt to Lebanon, because it is one of the few countries that doesn't require a visa for Egyptians.

Later, Salem was able to arrange for his new life in Turkey and he brought his family. When his personal bag was stolen with all the family's passports, it created big trouble for him. "The

embassy issued passports to all of my family members except me, saying that I had a security problem in Cairo and I need to return in order to issue a new passport.” He considers himself lucky for being able to bribe an Egyptian official to issue him a passport. “There are tens of Egyptian activists in Istanbul who are living with an expired passport. While the Turkish state allows them to move inside the country with this expired passport, they can never go anywhere else, which makes them just a card in the negotiations between the Turkish and Egyptian regimes.” Salem believes that people who first were able to travel to Europe are in a better situation, as they can apply for asylum and get a refugee travel document eventually.

In this way, we see how the issuance of passports through embassies, which is looked upon as a neutral practice, actually embeds state power. Many of my informants who are still allowed to visit Egypt and left for economic reasons would refrain from attending political events related to the Egyptian situation. As one of them put it, “I don’t engage with politics even on Facebook. I still want to be able to visit my family, and to renew my passport.” He recalled a story of one of his friends:

“He is a prominent researcher and journalist on counter-terrorism strategies, he attended a conference where he discussed terrorism in Egypt and criticized the government strategy. When he arrived in Egypt, he was arrested at the airport and has been in jail ever since, despite all the calls from the international community to free him.” This informant believes that the Egyptian embassy in Berlin played a role in reporting his friend. He thinks that the Egyptian embassy has spies all over the city; many other informants confirmed the situation. “In every Egyptian restaurant in Berlin and at any event regarding Egypt, there’s security agents,” another person confirmed.

Preventing people from having passports is not the only tactic used by the Egyptian government. (Hamzawy and Dunne 2019) note that “The Egyptian government has systematically utilized its repressive tools to rein in exiled dissidents while also targeting media professionals and others active in the Egyptian opposition.” They continue: “Examples have included refusal to renew the passports of opposition members, prosecuting or imposing penalties on them in absentia, and, in some cases, threatening their families with prosecution and imprisonment.” These practices expanded the effectiveness of exile as a form of punishment. Since colonial times, exile has

helped to dismantle local political networks and normalize authoritarian practices without using excessive force.

Ahmed, who is my film's protagonist, may explain this better. After receiving medical training in Germany, he returned to Egypt, where he attended a demonstration. He was arrested and spent one year in jail. Throughout this year, German politicians, activists, and other exiled Egyptians adopted an international campaign to free him. He was eventually given a presidential pardon and told "If you do not leave Egypt as soon as possible, you will return to jail. But this time, you will never get out." In this way, the Egyptian government avoided international criticism and public anger about the case while at the same time, isolating Ahmed from his society, making him less effective. The state still practicing its power over him with the passport and threatened his mother and other family members in Egypt from time to time.

The Egyptian government has also started to block specific websites in order to control communications between the diaspora and the local context ([AFTE 2017](#)). Many of the blocked websites are Arabic news websites based outside Egypt, with exiled Egyptians working as reporters and journalists. While censoring the internet faces many technical difficulties rendering it almost impossible, the government attempt to do so just shows its focus on isolating the diaspora.

4.5 Applying for asylum

Many Egyptians who I have met avoid applying for asylum, preferring instead to experience difficult financial situations and having different legal reasons to excuse their stay in the country. Some of them register at university while not studying just to renew their residency until they find permanent solutions. Escaping the social stigma in European societies was one of the reasons why they avoided seeking asylum. Some of them apply for asylum but then skip the integration program following it.

Youssef, who applied for asylum in Germany, told me that he tried to find a way around applying for asylum but found no other options. He applied for asylum and as soon as he obtained his residency, he skipped the integration program by the state and moved to Berlin. He preferred to rely on the Egyptian network in Berlin to find a job for him, practicing his German language with

other Egyptian and German friends instead of attending lessons. Until now, he hasn't succeeded in finding a job. Yet he prefers to struggle financially rather than follow the integration program and receive unemployment help from the government.

Although Youssef was mysterious about his reasons for doing so, observing his daily life may give us insights into why. His daily routine consists of meeting other Egyptians, and organizing social and political events related to the diaspora community. This kind of social life isn't available in German cities other than Berlin because it's the center. Following an integration program would take Youssef outside Berlin and isolate him from this network. Thus, he perceived the integration program as an extension of the first punishment imposed on him by the Egyptian government. The same is applied to the refugee system, which requires asylum seekers to stay in camps for a while until they are given a decision. This removes all agency from asylum seekers over their freedom of movement.

5 What the camera can't see

While the next chapter will be more concerned with analyzing video material from my fieldwork, in this chapter I will focus on what was not recorded, or what the camera didn't see.

As I explained before, I was considered to be a friend or a colleague to many of my informants. Therefore, I played two roles during my research, I played the role of researcher (and observer) and also the role of friend, often engaging in different kinds of friendly discussions. I was honest with my informants about my project. Most of them didn't mind me taking notes from our conversation to use in my research.

However, when the camera was there, some of my informants would ask me not to film certain things. This prevented me from collecting visual evidence about many situations in my informants' lives. I was often not allowed to film any social gathering where people consumed alcohol. The majority of my informants asked me not to film them while drinking. When they wanted to talk about personal issues, some people requested that I turn off the camera. These personal issues could range anywhere from issues such as relationships outside marriage or discussing sensitive information that may risk the safety of people inside Egypt.

Moreover, many of my informants had experience in front of cameras as political activists. This caused them to adopt a certain type of language and speaking style when I'm recording with the camera. They are used to being in front of the camera so these changes from their off-camera personas weren't always obvious, but they were still there. For instance, on camera the informants tended to talk in a more organized way, breaking their ideas into smaller points and concluding their idea towards the end.

The theory of (Goffman 1999) on social performance explains social situations as a stage where actors put on different masks. What I noticed is that the camera was a tool that enabled me to experience two different masks of the same character. People who are aware of the camera recording now expect an entirely different audience than those who are currently watching the stage. Thus, they now have different expectations regarding what is expected from them. The person who was just engaging with me as a friend in a conversation becomes an activist when the recording button is pressed, addressing audiences who will see my film. In other words, the

camera has presented a new stage that didn't exist in the situation before. The camera also functioned as a bridge between homeland and exile, as shown in the alcohol example. Social norms that are acceptable in German society were perceived by the informants to be unacceptable to the imagined audiences in their homeland.

I believe that these two stages or two masks – on camera and off-camera - can be used to produce different kinds of analysis. Producing knowledge using the camera depends on what the camera *could not* record, not only what it could record. In the rest of this chapter, I will apply this concept to my fieldwork.

It's important here to note that I obtained consent for using the data collected while I'm not recording in my research as well. My informants agreed to share this data under the condition of anonymity; therefore, I didn't face any ethical challenge in doing this analysis.

The majority of informants referred to many incidents where the government leaked videos and phone call recordings of political activists, broadcasting them through the state owned media or on the internet. My informants used these examples in the context of asking me to stop recording some aspects of their lives. They didn't want me to record, even if I promised I would not use the material for the film. The informants underscored the Egyptian government's ability to hack into different computers.

External documents such as (Abdelsalam 2014) and (Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) 2014) shows that the Egyptian government has invested many efforts into recording and broadcasting the personal phone calls of activists. This practice of publishing the records was limited somehow, used by the government in a few incidents to discredit the state's political opponents because the recordings contained language and personal details about activists that can be seen as unacceptable by society.

My fieldwork has shown that this practice has allowed the government power to expand beyond physical geographic location to normalize a certain kind of behaviour between a diaspora, at least when the stage is concerning the local atmosphere. In this way, the government is still in control of communication between the diaspora and homeland, maintaining power over knowledge as Foucault explained.

It is worth noting that this strategy cannot be achieved without power being distributed over society's structure. It cannot be achieved without the cooperation of the phone companies that allowed the recordings to happen, the security forces that recorded the calls, and the media that broadcasted them. These broadcasted calls could not achieve the state's intended purpose for them without religious institutions and schools telling society what is acceptable behavior.

Finally, it is the audience who hears the calls and judges the activists for their personal life choices. Power here is subtle and distributed over the hierarchy. The camera therefore represents the power of the panopticon. The camera's existence meant the bridge between homeland and diaspora is open, therefore, the panopticon is active. An ethnographer in this situation represents the audience of his film. With the internet and video sharing platforms, an ethnographer with a camera may represent the power of literally the entire world embodied in his small camera.

This should make us question the ability of visual evidence, by itself, to produce knowledge that empowers the oppressed. As an example, I will take drinking alcohol in the Egyptian context. A study by (Foda 2019) shows that drinking alcohol was normal in Egypt during the 1950s; the Egyptian government actually endorsed drinking the national beer in a competition with imported brands.

With Egypt shifting to an open market policy in the 1970s, the political regime endorsed Islamic values to oppress the socialist movement. This was reflected in the beer industry until it reached a very bad situation in the late 1980s (Foda 2019). I found one interesting legal document from this period: the decision of the Ministry of Tourism, number 137, in 1981. The decision asks hotels, restaurants, and other touristic organizations not to serve any alcohol for Egyptians during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan that year (Tourism minister 1981) Later this decision will become a law effective until today. The decision was clear about applying this only to Egyptian citizens. This is yet again another instance where the aim is to normalize a certain kind of behavior in society through the normalizing power of the state, as Foucault explained. It also ties certain behaviors to the national identity defining what does it mean to be an Egyptian by the state.

This leaves us in the difficult position of trying to collect visual evidence about certain topics that the government doesn't allow us to get closer to. Depending solely on visual evidence in anthropological research will only generate knowledge supporting the existing power structures,

instead of challenging or questioning them. It will confirm society's narratives about itself, even if these narratives are superficial and misleading. In addition to that, the power of the ethnographer over the film's narrative and translation, as well as his privileged position in the field, is an important consideration as well, as noted by much of the literature. I think we should also consider the camera's tremendous ability to work as a panopticon for power. The camera here is surveilling instead of revealing. It ensures that every actor on the stage is wearing the mask required to be worn by the power.

The limitation of visual evidence goes beyond that. I struggled to include women in my film. While many of them agreed to appear in the film, the restrictions in their lives were much greater than those of their male peers. I'm talking about the restrictions that were set by them around the recording, not around my knowledge, as the female informants expected more oppression and stronger reactions from their conservative homeland than they did from me as a man. Again, this should call into question the ability of visual evidence to produce knowledge because the knowledge produced will be missing or ignoring some important elements from the lives of these women. This is yet another way in which visual knowledge, when used by itself, indirectly supports certain biases in society embedded in and produced by power structures.

With all of that being said, I still found the camera itself to be very useful in examining and analyzing these power structures. The camera has the ability to draw a line between what is and is not tolerated by society; therefore, we can determine what fits into the existing power structures and what does not. For instance, when an activist was telling me about his way out of Egypt, he was afraid that this video may later be used to incriminate him, as he left Egypt illegally. He asked me to stop recording and take notes only.

What the camera did not see here was revealing in regards to the state's legal structure and the power embedded within it. The camera's existence itself was very useful in revealing that. I call this *the passive use of a camera*, where the camera is used, or not used to be precise, in order to reveal certain power structures in society. The camera's presence allows us to study the different masks worn by actors in contrast when before their local audience as opposed to an international audience.

6 National identity and resistance

Foucault's early works received a lot of criticism for portraying power as absolute and non-negotiable. In this chapter, I will focus more on resistance. I propose that my informants were performing their national identity as a form of resistance to the situation in which they found themselves.

6.1 National identity

As explained in a previous chapter, the national identity of the "Egyptian" was used by the government to extend its power over the bodies of the citizens. This was true even before citizenship became an official concept - in the form of differentiating between Egyptian and non-Egyptian in punishments. In later stages, it was used to enforce specific behavior and ideology, as we have seen with alcohol. The legal documents regarding citizenship became a tool to isolate and control political opponents' bodies outside the Egyptian border.

For a period of time, primordialism was the theory to go when talking about national identity. Theorists of primordialism believed that national identity is attributed to ties of blood. They thought national identity is inevitable, something that perceived us in our first moment of life. It's a mode of being. It has to do with our feelings that we cannot control. It's not a result of our society or our culture, it's a result of human existence.

Primordialism is one of the most criticized theories on national identity. Maybe the paper titled "The poverty of primordialism", by (Eller and Coughlan 1993) was the most famous critique. They made it evident that nationalism is a social construct. It's a product of our society not any mystical metaphysical power that was there since humans existed.

Modernists such as (Gellner, 1983) and (Anderson 1991) provide more scientific ideas on the national identity. (Gellner, 1983) believed that nationalism and national identity are a product of modernity and industrialization. Industrialization meant that there is no need for sophisticated labor anymore. Different machines can do different work. Therefore, labor was not required to do a huge amount of hand work, instead they are required to operate a machine. This meant the need

for a system where labor is trained for basic skills at the beginning. Then we can do a way less effort to train them to use a specific machine. Societies functioned as an army boot camp in that sense. And national identity is a product of this shared qualifications that the society has produced.

In his book *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 1991) famously introduced his theory on national identity. He explained the word “imagined” with the inability of the members of the smallest nation to know every other member in the community, yet they still have an image in their mind of what is common between them. Therefore, national identity for him lies in the collective imagination of the society. He points to the contradiction that a nation carries, since it is not similar to religion or kinship where there’s a clear common tie. Therefore, the term is inherently limited and sovereign.

With the enlightenment age transforming Europe, Anderson argues that national identity rose to replace religion. . The newspapers, brought to society by capitalism, started to present the national state as an ongoing story. Once you read the news, you assume that other people from your country have read it as well. Therefore, when you meet another community member, you have something to talk about, you have “a shared culture code.”

While Anderson makes many valid points about the shared culture code, this code is not necessarily shared by members of the Egyptian diaspora community. For instance, one of my informants told me: “I don’t think I can marry an European. They don’t get the jokes and it would kill me to be with someone who doesn’t understand the movies references that I make.” Yet on the other hand, if we examine this closely, we will see a more complex picture. The movies, similar to newspapers, have contributed to a shared cultural code. This shared cultural code goes beyond state borders, as Arabic films - especially Egyptian - are widely watched in all the Arab countries.

(Breuilly 1993) was skeptical of the ideas of (Anderson 1991), claiming that there is no grand theory that can explain the idea of national identity and nationalism. Instead, there are different kinds of nationalism in different places throughout the world. He notes in his book that Egyptian nationalism was formed during the apex of the pan-Arab nationalism movement. Egyptian nationalism was also influenced by the pan-Islamic movements that sees Islam as an identity.

Egyptian nationalism was a mix of both of those movements. Egyptian nationalism even ignored the contradiction between the two, with some leaders subscribing to both ideologies.

(Chatterjee 1993) also critiques (Anderson 1991)'s theory for its Eurocentrism. He questions the concept of “imagined communities:” if the third world had to choose between certain modulars produced by Europe and the west then “what is left for us to imagine?” He proposes that national identity was formed in the third world as a response to colonization. For him, it was an act of self-discipline where the colonized societies responded to the colonization belief of having material and spiritual superiority. National identity in the colonized world, for Chatterjee, was drawn in contrast with the other, or the west. It was an act of self-discipline in response to colonization. colonized society wanted to prove that they are not as backwards as the colonizer has claimed.

6.2 Egypt's revolution of 2011

While Chatterjee provides an explanation for the rise of nationalism and the formation of national identities in the postcolonial world, his theory doesn't explain the change that national identities have undergone since then. National identities as a social construct represent the power relations in any given society, and are therefore negotiable and subject to all sorts of resistance.

All of my informants who left Egypt post-2013 identified the revolution of January 25, 2011 as a turning point, either for them personally or for their relation to Egypt as a homeland.

The Egyptian revolution carried a very strong national narrative. The Egyptian flag was one of the revolution's symbols, in contrast with similar movements in the Arab region at the same time. Both the Syrian and Libyan revolutions adopted a different flag than the one used by the ruling state regimes, as they believed the national flag to be a representation of the regime that they are revolting against. The national anthem was one of the Egyptian revolution's chants. (Galal 2013) analyzed the narratives of participants in the Egyptian revolution during the first eighteen days. She believes that young activists had reclaimed their country during the revolution. She noticed the reconstruction of the Egyptian nation-state's identity during the revolution, with the meaning of being Egyptian taking on a new meaning in the demonstrations.

We can say that national identity was partially reinvented in Tahrir Square during the revolution. The state partly surrendered to the revolutionary movement, creating a power vacuum. This power vacuum in turn became a space for individuals and groups to create and attach meanings to national identity. For most of my informants, Egyptian national identity meant the symbols and meanings that they had attached to this moment.

The idea of redefining and colonizing (in some sense) national identity was strong during the revolution and shared among participants in the demonstrations. A French informant who lived in Egypt for more than ten years told me in a broken Arabic accent when I met her in Paris: “I consider myself an Egyptian because I attended the revolution, No one will understand this except people who were there!”

National identity, then, meant many things for my informants. When I wondered what it means to be an Egyptian, they sometimes gave clear answers to me, such as: “to understand our jokes” or to “live long enough in Egypt to consider it your home.” For them, Egyptian identity was represented in different cultural elements such as food, relationships, sarcasm, and language.

Many of my informants referred to their situation in exile as a punishment of participating in the revolution. And while the revolution has held many patriotic narratives, these narratives differentiate between Egyptian national identity and the current regime.

The post-2013 regime did not leave this power vacuum, in which Egyptian national identity had taken new forms, empty. It started to gain control over it by controlling the narratives of society. This was done not only by attempting to censor knowledge over the internet, but also by monopolizing cultural industries such as news, entertainment, and media (RSF 2017). The Egyptian government also began questioning the grand narratives upon which the national state was built. For instance, the regime had a very relaxed relationship with Israel (Associated Press 2019), a taboo for any Pan-Arab nationalism movement.

6.3 Performing national identity

Following Goffman's idea of social performance, (Conquergood 1989) cited in (Aly 2015) explains the direction of the "anthropology of performance" movement. He argues it can be understood under four key terms. "*Poetics, play, process and power.*"

For him, *poetics* refers to what is believed, fabricated, and created in our minds about human realities. Culture is not a given, rather it is a social construct. Cultures are "made up" just like fiction. *Play* refers to the creative process in which actors go through in their performances. *Process* represents the shift from perceiving cultural reproduction from seeing as mimesis to seeing as kinesis, focusing on social dynamics instead of social structure.

Finally, *power* refers to the emergence of subfields asking questions such as: "How are performances situated between forces of accommodation and resistance? How do they simultaneously reproduce and struggle against hegemony?" These two questions are the focus of this part of the thesis. If we are studying informants who are oppressed by the overwhelming power of the state as I explained, then cultural performance should be understood in the context of this power/resistance relation. How do Egyptians produce and reproduce cultural identity? How do they perform it in relation to power?

I will focus not on cultural performance in general, but on cultural performance of national identity. I am using the term national identity here to group together a variety of cultural performances that don't have anything in common except for the clear indication of the "Egyptness" of them. I'm referring here to practices that transcend locality and ethnicity. For instance, when it comes to food, informants were excited to eat Egyptian dishes that aren't common in their locality, or that they didn't used to eat it when they lived in Egypt. Nevertheless, these dishes are still celebrated and underscored for being Egyptian.

I claim that the majority of material recorded during my fieldwork is Egyptians' performance of a type of national identity, with expressions and emphasis upon this display being a constant feature in the filmed material. One of my informants' rooms was filled with artifacts from Egypt (figure3.), mainly souvenirs representing ancient Egyptian in addition to some Islamic references. Even pillows and mattresses had Egyptian references.



Figure 3. A photo of a part of the room's wall

In their language, they used references to the Egyptian revolution and Egypt all the time, even out of context. This is exemplified by a conversation that took place between two of my informants in Berlin:

- *Do you want to join us and watch the match?*

- *I don't think so.*

- *Don't you like football?*

- *Not at all, my relation to football is similar to my relation to the National Party.*

Here he refers to the National Democratic Party, the party that used to rule Egypt before the revolution of 2011. The reference here confirms a “shared cultural code” between Egyptians, but especially between those who were engaged with the Egyptian revolution. The metaphor serves as a reminder to both parties that they belong to the homeland and are affected by the big events that took place there. It serves as resistance to their realities; realities in which they are separated from their society and they aren't allowed to discuss the revolution openly in the Egyptian context.

Many other ways of performing national identity were adopted between community members. This wasn't limited to those who are exiled, but included those who visit Egypt regularly as well. These regular returnees shared some common ways of performance with the exiled activists.

One of the interesting aspects I found about the performance of national identity was the usage of Egyptian national flag. Exiled activists usually had an Egyptian flag they use in demonstrations and events regarding the political situation in Egypt. People who avoid engaging in politics also use the national flag during a social gathering where they watched a football match for the national team.

Let's presume the diaspora is doomed to experience the overwhelming power of the state - a power that isolates them morally (by denying issuing passports for exiled persons) and physically (by conditioning their return to Egypt with spending time in jail or with personal economic failure). If so, then members of the diaspora community are doomed in a sense to show resistance in response to this power. One strategy of resistance to this power is to cling to national identity, perform it, and sometimes overstate it.

6.4 Everyday resistance

Before we go further into the discussion of different examples of resistance, there is a point worth making about resistance. If we saw the performance of national identity as an act of resistance, then are we not crediting people with resistance just for existing the way they are? Can we attribute all of these actions to resistance? (Abu-Lughod 1990) correctly notes that there is a tendency to romanticize resistance among anthropologists; she courageously admits that even in her works she may have romanticized resistance by Bedouin women. By romanticizing, she means to read all forms of resistance as “as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated.”

To avoid falling into this trap, I rely on the theory of *everyday resistance* (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013, 2016). They note that the concept has been widely discussed since James Scott introduced it in 1985. Everyday resistance was introduced differentiate between open and direct resistance and rebellion, and other more subtle kinds of resistance expressed on a daily basis,

such as escape, sarcasm, passivity, and laziness. They try to simplify everyday resistance as “how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power.”

Vinthege and Johansson see everyday resistance as a “form of activity that often avoids being detected.” They believe that everyday resistance is done *routinely*, and is not organized or politically articulated. They proposed four fundamental assumptions about everyday resistance:

"(1) Everyday resistance is a practice (not a certain consciousness, intent or outcome);

(2) It is historically entangled with (everyday) power (not separated, dichotomous or independent);

(3) Everyday resistance needs to be understood as intersectional with the powers that it engages with (not one single power relation);

and (4) it is heterogeneous and contingent due to changing contexts and situations (not a universal strategy or coherent form of action) (Vinthege and Johansson 2013)."

Based on these four assumptions, they argue that resistance neither needs to be intentional nor recognizable by the target of this resistance. In the context of everyday resistance, people interrupt different actions differently. Therefore, what really counts is action itself. Everyday resistance doesn't need to have any particular effect over the power. All we should look for is the potential of the action in undermining the power.

It is in this context that I have tried to understand my fieldwork. In the next chapter, I will describe examples of this everyday resistance from my fieldwork. I use both film and text to give examples of everyday resistance in regards to “food, social spaces, sarcasm;” hoping to illuminate some aspects of this resistance.

7 Examples of performing national identity

In this chapter, I provide a descriptive account of the performances I have recorded that I consider to be acts of resistance.

7.1 Practicing resistance through passports

I have provided a historical account and context in which the Egyptian state uses the passport as a tool to punish and control the citizens. What I want to describe here is a general pattern of clinging to both legal citizenship and Egyptian passports among the diaspora community as an act of resistance.

As I mentioned before, exiled persons showed a tendency to avoid, to the greatest extent possible, applying for asylum. The reasons for this avoidance can be many, among them is that asylum-seeking is a process through which state power – in the form of punishment – is expanded and exercised. This made me consider or contemplate the practice of keeping Egyptian citizenship and Egyptian passport. During my fieldwork in Berlin, my informants used to discuss their future plans. Some of them wanted to earn German citizenship “in order to feel more free” and “to be able to live anywhere I want” while others preferred not to earn any other citizenship besides their Egyptian citizenship. One of my informants asserted: “I’m an Egyptian and I cannot imagine myself as anything else.” Others preferred to use the Egyptian passport while still valid, avoiding carrying a German refugee travel document.

Even those who wanted German citizenship often discussed how to maintain dual citizenships in Germany. Citizens are allowed to keep dual citizenship only in a few exceptional circumstances, according to German law.

Based on a lengthy fieldwork study of the Tibetan diaspora in both India and the United States, ([Hess 2009](#)) observes and analyzes Tibetan diaspora behavior and reflects on their culture. All Tibetans are either stateless, refugees, or carry another citizenship. Hess discusses the views of the Tibetan diaspora views towards citizenship. In India, the diaspora considers stateless Tibetans to be good Tibetans. Diaspora Tibetans in India and Nepal refuse to carry another citizenship as

they believe it makes their claim to their homeland in Tibet less legitimate. In the US, Tibetans apply for citizenship and seek to be represented in different governmental bodies as a diaspora, actually gaining more political power for the Tibetan community because of their flexibility.

While the Tibetan diaspora in Nepal and India consider another citizenship to be giving up their historical right to their land, the same is not the case for the Egyptian diaspora in Europe. Most exiled Egyptians do not feel that acquiring citizenship threatens their collective identity.

Moreover, the political context in Germany and France are similar to the United States, not Nepal. Also similar to Tibetans in the United States, my informants engage with different democratic structures to advocate for their cause.

The passport or citizenship here does not represent what it represents for the state. It represents a connection to the homeland that they feel forced to give up. Therefore, they resist it while underscoring its importance. The same goes for citizenship. In this way, we can see how resistance and power intersect over society's structure. The identification document was a source of knowledge in society, in which the state expressed its power through categorization and surveillance. For my informants, it was a tool of resistance as well, underscoring the connection to their homeland from which they were isolated.

One of my informants told me about a legal battle with the Egyptian embassy, when he tried to get them to issue him a passport. After the court decided that he has the right to get a passport from the embassy in his country, the embassy did not execute the court's decision. Although there was nothing he could do about this, he does not think his legal battle was a wasted effort. "They want us to lose hope, and by doing this I was saying I still have hope," he explains, "At least I didn't let it go without a battle."

7.2 Reconstructing home, Egyptian *Ahwa*

Reconstructing homeland experiences is another form of resistance to isolation from the homeland. Recreating experiences from the homeland plays a central role in the Egyptian diaspora community. Here I want to elaborate a bit on coffee shops or the *ahwas*, which have a special place in the Egyptian identity.

As I remember growing up, the *Ahwa* was an essential space for social gathering in every neighborhood in Egypt. It is almost a male-only place but in more liberal contexts, such as in downtown Cairo and Alexandria, the *ahwa* is a place for both men and women. I remember during the revolution and the following years that coffee shops were the place to go to conduct political meetings, agree on press statements, and prepare for events. I also remember during university, my friends and I would go to coffee shops every day after class to discuss our days, study, and just hang out.

I visited Paris for several days, where I attended a press conference held by the Egyptian Human Rights Forum (EHRF), which is a newly-established platform for the Egyptian diaspora that advocates for democracy and human rights in Egypt from abroad. I met with many activists during the conference and in the two days afterwards, I met with more than ten Egyptian activists who had attended the conference, and was able to talk with them about my project. Those meetings all took place in coffee shops or bars where these activists meet almost on a daily basis to discuss Egyptian politics, share news about their friends and colleagues in Egyptian jails, and talk about everyday life. The topic of French politics came up only once during my personal meetings with them, and they were discussing the French prime minister Emmanuel Macron's visit to Egypt.

Later I visited Berlin, spending the remainder of my fieldwork meeting with Egyptians there. Most of these meetings took place at small coffee shops near the center of Berlin. The atmosphere inside seemed very political, the walls were covered with posters about political and social causes and quotes from coffee shop visitors. By the bar, there were a number of flyers about political causes and events, often from leftist movements or for minority rights.

My informants meet at this coffee shop on a daily basis, sitting in groups that vary in number according to the day and everyone's schedule. They discuss the same topics as my Egyptian informants in Paris discussed. Sometimes there were only two people in addition to me, and at other times there were at least ten Egyptians sharing a table. The coffee shop had many Arab visitors every time I was there. It was often a very diverse atmosphere with people from all nationalities.

The coffee shop is located in an area called *Kottbusser Tor*. Although known to Berliners as a crime-ridden place, my informants underscored that this a racist characterization of the area, as

Kotti has a large immigrant population. In any case, I was usually offered marijuana by street dealers during the short walk between the underground station and the bar. While the legality of marijuana is a grey area in the Berlin state law, I could see how Egyptians would tolerate marijuana more than Germans. Although marijuana is decriminalized in Germany and strictly forbidden in Egyptian law, I felt that in practice it is the other way around.

There are a couple of Egyptian coffee shops in Berlin. I went to one of them once during my fieldwork. It was designed to look like an authentic Egyptian coffee shop (*ahwa*). Yet my informants didn't like to go anywhere near there, describing it as "full of estate agents employed by the Egyptian embassy to spy on people who sit there."

On every table at the bar there was a sign written in German, English, and Arabic stating that anyone who rolls or smokes marijuana inside the coffee shop will be kicked out and will not be allowed to return again. Regardless, these signs didn't prevent my informants from rolling and smoking a joint of hashish when I was there once.

In the coffee shop, I used to sit with my camera ready while my informants spent most of their time on their mobiles reading and discussing Egyptian news. Sometimes these discussions contained important and interesting insights for my project and other times there

In an ethnographic study of undocumented Egyptian workers in Paris, [\(Saad 2005\)](#) discusses the different networks that Egyptians formed there. She describes coffee shops for Egyptian as "an informal institution that serves as a focus (and locus) of strong network links among Egyptian workers in Paris." She described a coffee shop that she studied as a "real Egyptian coffee shop." She believes it is "real" because it was founded by an association of Egyptian immigrants, and most of the coffee shop visitors are Egyptians with the TV usually turned on to an Arabic channel. The coffee shop serves many social and economical functions for the Egyptian community, the same as an Egyptian coffee shop or *ahwa* serves in Egypt.

An article from the Los Angeles Times published in [\(MURPHY 1990\)](#) describes the Egyptian coffee shop in a beautiful story that he wrote from Cairo. He wrote "Nowhere is there an institution so uniquely Arab as the place where an Arab goes to sip his coffee, and nowhere has the leisurely art of enjoying a drink and a smoke been refined as it has by the Egyptians. There is

on every Cairo street corner, or just a few doors away, a casually assembled collection of round tables and cane-backed chairs, dominoes and water pipes.”

Both Murphy and Saad made the observation that Egyptian coffee-shops are male-only place, a valid observation in the areas they studied; Murphy, poor neighborhoods in Cairo during 1990s, and Saad, a coffee shop in Paris for undocumented Egyptian workers. But this was not the case with me when I studied exiled Egyptian activists in Europe. These activists tend to carry liberal ideologies. So although I would still say the environment was male-dominant; however, the meetings of my informants usually had diverse genders.

In his book “Becoming Arab in London” ([Aly 2015](#)) experiences the coffee shop or *ahwa* and focuses his analysis on gender and identity. What is worth noting in Aly’s book is his in-depth analysis of water pipes or *shisha*. While I found his book to be very revealing about the Arab community in the UK, I found him contradicting visual evidence from my fieldwork in many instances; even the water pipes were missing in my fieldwork.

The reason behind this disparity isn't a lack of accuracy on Aly's part; it is, rather, due to the fact that my informants have had a different experience from the mainstream Arab experience. In fact, they are trying to rebel against everything described by him. Different gender orientations, for instance, are expressed freely within the exiled community. Here I would also like to note that this is the case with the community I studied in my fieldwork. I imagine it wouldn't be the same with the diaspora community in Istanbul, for instance, which is mostly Islamists).

I will now return to the idea of expressing a certain type of national identity. The coffee shop where they met and planned their political events was closer to a revolutionary coffee shop than a normal coffee shop. By revolutionary coffee shop, I mean a number of coffee shops around downtown Cairo and Alexandria where activists used to meet during and after the revolution of 2011. This was the idea behind the coffee shop in Berlin, which had become for the Egyptian diaspora community a version of home that they are trying to reconstruct as an act of resistance.

7.3 Food

Some of my informants were exiled in the sense that they cannot return to Egypt even for a visit while some others travel from Egypt to Berlin or Paris, and vice versa. Those who can travel represent a small window of communication between those who are exiled and their homeland. Most of my informants shared stories about something brought from Egypt for them. The list of the things brought from Egypt includes food, books, antiques, and other items as well.

Food comes first on this list for a reason. When talking with my informants in Berlin and Paris about what they ask their friends coming from Egypt to bring for them, food was most often the answer. Both Berlin and Paris are known as international cities and since there's a large number of Arab migrants there, it's not difficult to find many authentic Egyptian food ingredients. Nevertheless, there is some Egyptian food that cannot usually be found in the European market, either due to food safety regulations or due to the lack of economic incentive for importers. European Union regulations prevent individuals travelling to the EU from bringing milk, meat, or animal products, but these types of food are still brought from Egypt to Europe regardless. Unique Egyptian cheeses were top on the list of things that my informants told me they requested to be brought from Egypt. Egyptian *Rumi* cheese as well as Egyptian dried meat (*pastirma*) are usually gifts that people bring with them from Egypt and distribute to exiled Egyptians.

I shared the traditional Egyptian meal *usban* with one of my informants; he was so proud to share this rarely-found meat in Europe. *Usban* is a type of sausage made of sheep intestines, therefore individuals are not allowed to bring it when travelling to Germany. My informant joked about that, saying "I made my all of my friends international food smugglers." He says it is worth the risk for most of his friends because airport security rarely enforces food regulation legislation. There is also not that much at stake if the person bringing the food were to be discovered; the food would be confiscated and he or she would be fined.

In this way, we can see the intersectionality of everyday resistance. Different states represent different forms of power. It is interesting how resistance to the isolation of exile is practiced by those friends who "smuggle" food from Egypt; they challenge the authorities in order to keep the exiled connected to their homeland in one way or another.

My informants often ate variations of Egyptian food such as Syrian falafel, which is made out of chickpea while the Egyptian version is made out of broad bean. Other times they ate other international food, such as burgers and pizza. On rare occasions, they tried other authentic food, such as sushi and other Asian cuisines.

The dinner made from Egypt *usban* was a celebration worthy of the invitation of other Egyptians. My informant invited me and three other Egyptians to share the small smuggled *usban* meal together. At the table, we shared a discussion about the different regions in Egypt, noting how the people of Alexandria usually have special names for Egyptian food. For example, *rumi* cheese is called *torky* cheese, and *usban* is called *mumbar*. We also shared our memories about eating the same food when we were in Egypt.

Although the amount of food was obviously not enough for everyone, the ritual of eating it together was important to all of them, and worth going to the other side of the city for. The *usban* meal is a reminder of home.

Egyptian food was often abundant at social gatherings I attended in Berlin and Paris. My fieldwork took place during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month. Egyptians usually fast daily during this month, from sunrise until sunset. They break their fasting with a meal called the *iftar*. *Iftars* are usually a reason to invite family and friends over to share the meal. One of my informants told me that he does not feel the "Ramadan spirit" anymore since he left Egypt. But he did feel it for a short time when he entered an *iftar* party hosted by an Egyptian. The host's home had Egyptian traditional décor for Ramadan, and the television was playing Ramadan-themed Egyptian shows. He cooked in traditional dishes from Alexandria, and other people either brought or made Egyptian food. My informant expressed his disappointment that his feeling of the "Ramadan spirit" vanished as soon as he left the party: "I wish it lasted a lot longer."

One significant event I remember was during an Iftar that I attended in Paris. Although only a minority of the people attending actually fast during the day, people came prior to Iftar over an hour early and nobody drank or ate anything until a mobile app announced that it was "Maghrib" time. While they didn't really need to wait for the time, they wanted to affirm to each other that they are all committed to recreating the homeland experience. If Egyptian state power wants us to miss this experience, then we are resisting together.

7.4 Sarcasm

The Egyptian use of sarcasm as an act of resistance was evident during the revolution of 2011. Egyptians generally considered themselves to have a good sense of humor. Many examples from Egyptian pop culture praise sarcasm as a way of coping with the pain of everyday life. Exiled Egyptian author Waguih Ghali wrote the following in his novel *Beer in the Snooker Club*:

“I am a real Egyptian. I have our humor. Even though my 'Egyptian' has been enfeebled by my stay in England and by the books I have read, I have the Egyptian character...We would all have died a long time ago if we didn't have our humor. ”

Among my informants, sarcasm was a common practice. Wassim in particular, an informant from Berlin, used it during his everyday life. He expressed to me the difficulty he has in getting along with someone who “isn't Egyptian” because they don't understand “Egyptian sarcasm.” He also talked about how sarcasm enables him to cope with the alienation that he feels. Sarcasm featured prominently in the life of another informant Mohamed, who was launching a page on Facebook featuring only funny or sarcastic political photos and memes, all of which directly aim at the Egyptian government.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that Egyptians used sarcasm to define their identity. Some referred to understanding the same sense of humor as an essential feature of any future partner. Practicing sarcasm is opening a bridge to the homeland and to pride in their national identity. Egyptians often show pride and repeat national myths such as “Egyptians are the funniest among all Arabs.” Members of the Egyptian diaspora community feel that their national identity is being attacked by the exile, so they utilize sarcasm to confirm their identity to each other.

Many jokes contain references to the Egyptian revolution and informants' time in Egypt. At a social event I attended in Paris, ten activists sat together at dinner. One of the guests was asked to sing for the others but he refused. In response, they started chanting “The people want to hear the song!” in the same tone with which the most recognizable slogan of the Egyptian revolution is chanted. (*Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam* or “*The people want to bring down the regime*”). In this way, the joke invoked their identity, confirmed it to each other, and reminded each other of it in the face of their everyday lives, in which they have to work and interact with Europeans most

of the time. This feels like a threat to their identity, and also makes them feel that state power's in isolating them is effective.

In sum, sarcasm serves as a platform for everyday resistance. Through sarcasm, my informants practice their national identities in their everyday life, deploying language and metaphors as a mode of resistance.

8 Conclusion

Recent political events in Egypt following the revolution of 2011, and the current authoritarian government, have led to many Egyptians to leave the country. The Egyptians who left now gathering in many capitals around the world, forming an Egyptian diaspora.

In my fieldwork in Berlin and Paris, I used participant observation with a camera to collect empirical evidence about my informants. I applied reflexivity as well as a general practice in my analysis.

Foucault's theory of power is highly relevant to the emergence of the Egyptian national identity and the formation of modern Egypt. Exile as a punishment is used by the state as a normalizing power strategy against political opponents in Egypt. Exile aims to dismantle the social network of the political movement and isolate effective actors and activists from the state.

The camera's presence adds an additional audience to any social setting. Thus, recording any video will incline persons to perform for whomever they presume will comprise the audience watching the film. In other words, recording any video means that social actors will wear the face or mask suitable for this audience.

An ethnographer can observe a lot about power structures in society by analyzing the different faces an actor uses when the camera is recording versus when it is not. In this sense, research is driven by the non-existence of certain visual evidence rather than the existence of it. When an ethnographer recognizes the importance of what is not recorded, he/she implements what I call the *passive use of cameras*.

Citizenship and passports did not just give the state the power of determining who is within state borders but also who is outside of them. We can see this by analyzing the history and current practices related to passports and exile as a form of punishment.

Egyptian national identity was formed throughout the course of a long process. Empirical evidence shows that national identity is negotiable. The power structure of the state was shaken many times since the Egyptian revolution in 2011, allowing my informants to form their own

ideas about national identity and express resistance to mainstream national identity narratives. Empirical evidence also shows that exiled people tend to perform their definition of national identity as an act of resistance to their isolation from their homeland.

Acts of resistance are common among members of the Egyptian diaspora community. Some acts of resistance include attachments to symbols connected to the homeland, even if these symbols represented oppressive state power, such as citizenship and passports. In Egyptian Arabic both words are used synonymously to refer to the legal relation between a person and their national state.

Reconstructing home experiences is another form of resistance. Diaspora community members fight back against their isolation from Egypt by recreating common aspects of daily life there. This can be seen in the re-creation of the atmosphere of a revolutionary Egyptian coffee shop or *ahwa*. It can also be seen in Egyptian food and the rituals performed around it.

The resistance extends to include everyday resistance, which is displayed in performance and also in acts such as sarcasm.

While being critical of power structures, it is important to look critically at ourselves as well, considering the possible limitations inherent to any scientific research.

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