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THE POLITICS OF 'EXIT': EMIGRATION &  
SUBJECT-MAKING PROCESSES IN MODERN  
EGYPT

**Abstract**

How does emigration affect the politics of the country of origin? This paper argues that emigration is constitutive of subject-making processes within the sending state. Steering away from instrumentalist approaches that treat it as a prudential act, cross-border mobility is here examined as licensed political participation. By engaging in (or abstaining from) migration, citizens embed themselves deeper into specific social norms and practices as defined, discursively and substantively, by governmental policies. The act of migration, thus, allows citizens to infuse meaning into distinct social orders and engage in subject-making processes. The empirical case of modern Egypt demonstrates how such an approach can shed light upon the ways through which political structures are affected by emigration in non-democracies. In the divergent approaches to migration under President Nasser and, later, under Presidents Sadat and Mubarak, lie two different normative 'constructions' of the Egyptian subject: the frugal, self-sufficient Egyptian who rejects emigration under Nasser is contrasted with the self-interested, profit-seeking Egyptian subject-migrant under Sadat and Mubarak. By highlighting this opposition through the framework of cross-border mobility, this paper seeks to shed light into the multiple resonances that migration has as a subject-making process, and enhance our understanding of the politics of emigration under non-democratic regimes.



INTRODUCTION

How does the phenomenon of emigration politically affect the country of origin? Does emigration lead to a reconfiguration of the workings of political power within that country and, if so, in what ways? This paper attempts to answer these questions by approaching population mobility as an act of political participation.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to part of the literature that considers migrants to be autonomous actors making rational decisions, migrants are

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viewed here as subjects who operate within a political community that features distinct sets of rules and demarcated fields of action. A citizen's migration, or abstention from migration, constitutes an act of licensed political participation insofar as that citizen responds to given situations within the political sphere; yet, that sphere is also marked by strict criteria of exclusion and inclusion that determine what kinds of activity should be allowed. Through this participatory act, citizens are not affirming their sovereign will; they are immersing themselves deeper in a specific social order. In this reading, emigration is a political act that responds not simply to governmental policy but also to diverse practices throughout the social body. Thus, one's engagement with, or abstention from, the act of migration gives meaning not only to formal government regulations, but also to expectations within the social world. In what ways do government practices interact with manners and forms of social interaction, and how do they form migration as a participatory act that one is expected to follow, or abstain from?

To approach such questions, one must examine how political ideas on migration become socially constituted frames of reference, leading citizens to make sense of their daily lives and define their engagement with power. Migration is seen as an act of interpellation, through which the citizen, by responding to particular forms of government and social norms, contributes to the reinforcement and reproduction of modes of political power.<sup>2</sup> Put differently, in order to comprehend the power of migration as an act of participation, one must delineate the ascribed roles that citizens are asked to perform, sketching the manner in which political ideas are disseminated, take on meaning, and become dominant. In line with this reasoning, the discourse on migration is approached as the mutual constitution of conceptions and practices, in an attempt at identifying both how power organizes around migration, and the possibilities of resistance.

This work focuses on the Middle East in an effort to steer research away from essentialist claims of exceptionalism ascribed to Arab, Muslim, or Middle East culture. While each region is endowed with its own socio-political specificities, there are multiple parallels that can be drawn between the Middle East and other areas, such as Latin America or Southeast Asia, in terms of the centrality of migration in the countries of origin's political structures. The focus on the Middle East also allows for an exploration of the varieties of localized meanings behind migration as an act of political participation within the country of origin. Thus, this paper aims to add to the growing, albeit mainly

Western-oriented, interest in the matter, particularly by comparative politics scholars.

As a region, the Middle East has been historically rich in population movements. That said, the choice of modern Egypt as a case study is based on two factors. First, the country has a historical standing as the largest regional provider of migrant labor.<sup>3</sup> Second, the qualitative variety of migratory processes throughout the history of modern Egypt, and their quantitative increase in the post-1973 period have endowed the Egyptian case with a vast array of writings, debates, customs, and social rituals on migration, whose discursive importance has been unexamined by the literature. This paper argues that discourse on migration under Nasser reflected a broader collectivist ethos, under which the theme of population movement was employed to discipline Egyptian citizens in accordance with the regime's ideology of statism-developmentalism.<sup>4</sup> In sharp contrast to this, migration and, more specifically, return migration under Sadat and Mubarak was employed to promote an individualization of responsibility, as citizens disciplined themselves to use their freedom in making responsible choices under a broader turn towards neoliberalism.<sup>5</sup>

This paper's aims reflect the choice of research methods. It employs multiple interviews with elites and experts conducted in Cairo, as well as a discursive analysis of archival government documents, presidential speeches and published interviews, and political memoirs, together with content analysis of how the three major semi-governmental daily newspapers in Egypt covered the issue of migration in the 1952–2010 period (*al-Ahram*, *al-Akhbar*, *al-Jumhuriya*).<sup>6</sup> The paper also employs an ethnographic examination of the long-term impact of emigration on citizens in the urban Cairo setting conducted between July 2013 and March 2014, in order to shed light on how citizens internalize, implement, or transform these discourses.<sup>7</sup> Its structure is as follows: first, the paper examines how the concept of citizens' political participation can shed light on the socio-political effects of migratory processes within the country of origin. It then proceeds to analyze how the Egyptian regime under Nasser and, subsequently, during the Sadat and Mubarak period strategically utilized the theme of migration in dialectically shaping citizens in accordance with the regime's respective priorities. Building on the contrast between the two periods, the paper argues that migration constitutes a form of political participation that serves not only as a socially constituted frame of reference, but also as a means of determining the criteria of political inclusion and exclusion within a political community.

## UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SUBJECT-MAKING

*'Keep away from those who stuff themselves after they have starved'*  
Egyptian proverb

Despite the rising interest of social scientists in the phenomenon of emigration,<sup>8</sup> the literature has yet to address how migration affects subject-making processes in the country of origin. The socioeconomic effects of emigration and return have traditionally featured within the broader scholarship on labor migration, a field which has shed little overall light onto the ways through which the complex processes of emigration and return shape citizens. Neo-classical readings typically espouse the individualist rationale of income-maximizing migrants, while the 'new economics of migration' and economic sociology put forth a similarly depoliticized narrative of migration as a calculated strategy. However, in assigning a methodological individualism to the study of migration, both approaches operate under certain assumptions; most commonly, that migration is a prudential act of autonomous subjects. Overall, such works tend to be hampered by a totalizing, Schumpeterian emphasis on migrants as entrepreneurial individuals possessing perfect information. More often than not, they also tend to neglect that the phenomenon of migration encompasses multiple processes, of which emigration and return constitute only a part.<sup>9</sup>

Recent work within anthropology, cultural studies, and sociology has questioned the image of the migrant as the rational utility-maximizing actor by undermining the economic logic of studies on return migration,<sup>10</sup> as well as emphasizing cross-national familial, social and religious ties,<sup>11</sup> global political agendas,<sup>12</sup> and social, rather than merely economic, remittances.<sup>13</sup> However, an (over-) emphasis on agency shifts focus to migrants' intentions rather than the ordering of politics *per se*: if one questions the consciousness of citizens' act of migration (and return), or the degree of freedom to do so within specific social norms and expectations, then this literature's analytic utility falls somewhat short. On the other hand, the validity of purely determinist accounts, under which one's actions and roles cannot be modified, or even challenged, is similarly dubious: the history of political participation, and the practice of migration in particular, abound with instances of interpellated subjects resisting their ascribed roles or reneging on their social expectations.

How can the effects of migration be approached not simply through the interaction between the citizen and state regulations, but also through interactions with practices spread across the social body? In an attempt to bypass the pitfalls of the aforementioned epistemologies, this paper treats migration as a political act of citizens who are neither autonomous subjects nor inherently rational actors. Rather, their contingent choices and experiences take place within a wider system of rights and obligations, reinvented traditions, personal or familial networks, and religious normativity. Political acts are, thus, produced, and contested, through discourses and practices that emanate from both the government and the social world. By drawing upon the writings of Foucault, this approach allows a shift of focus away from the limiting concept of the state, which now “appears simply as one element—whose functionality is historically specific and contextually variable—in multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time, once we are able to “escape the neat division between state and society,” this reading enables an examination of “practices of power as they are deployed at the micro level of everyday life.”<sup>15</sup>

How would such a conceptualization shed light onto the complex phenomenon of migration? Anthropologists like Ong and Coutin provide ethnographic examples of how citizenship can be dialectically produced by Asian and Salvadorian immigrants in the United States, yet their analyses leave out any discussion of similar processes within immigrants’ country of origin.<sup>16</sup> The issue of whether power structures in immigrants’ home countries affected them, or continue to affect them, is left unanswered. In a recent examination of migration processes in the Philippines and India, Rodriguez and Schwenken attempt to answer this question by arguing that “labour-sending states set the regulatory frameworks and co-produce ‘ideal migrant subjects’ from which other social actors draw or contest.”<sup>17</sup> Their examination, however, eschews social processes by focusing on institutional mechanisms—such as formal recruitment processes and training centers—that emphasize the state as an object separate from society. At the same time, a broader theoretical question remains with regard to migration processes in non-democratic contexts. If authoritarian regimes are sufficiently concerned about population movements to establish migration-related institutions,<sup>18</sup> how do they shape the structure of the imaginative frameworks within which their subjects participate? In this matter, the case of Egypt provides enlightening insights.

## EGYPTIAN EMIGRATION &amp; SUBJECT-MAKING PROCESSES UNDER PRESIDENT NASSER, 1954-1970

*'To build factories is easy; to build hospitals and schools is possible; but to build a nation of men is a hard and difficult task.'*

Gamal Abdel Nasser, *National Assembly Speech*, 1957

The 1952 creation of the modern Egyptian state and Nasser's subsequent ascent to power coincided with a rise in diverse forms of emigration, despite various institutional restrictions on such population movements. The exodus of Egyptian Jews was coupled with the emigration of political dissenters (royalist supporters of the *ancien régime*; communists; Muslim Brothers) and foreigners (primarily Greeks, Italians, and Syrians).<sup>19</sup> More than forty thousand Egyptians were working abroad in the Yemen Arab Republic,<sup>20</sup> as were a few thousand in Syria during its short-lived unification with Egypt.<sup>21</sup> Rising numbers of high-skilled Egyptians would pursue temporary work across the Middle East and Africa, under the aegis of the Egyptian Ministry of Education.<sup>22</sup> A significant number of Egyptian students studying abroad never returned to Egypt,<sup>23</sup> while a growing percentage of Copts permanently left Egypt for North America, Europe, and Australia,<sup>24</sup> particularly following the introduction of the 1956 Constitution, which introduced Islam as an official religion.<sup>25</sup>

What is striking about these movements is that, in their vast majority, they were not openly acknowledged by the Egyptian regime, despite the fact that Nasser was wise to the political importance of emigration, as can be deduced from his privately aired concerns about rising Jewish migration to Israel and the Israeli presence in newly independent African states. Partially in response to Israeli policy, which Nasser termed as a "mask of imperialism," the President significantly expanded upon the policy of targeted temporary emigration (particularly Egyptian teachers, nurses, scientists, or military experts) to Arab and African states;<sup>26</sup> once there, they contributed to the spreading of Nasserist "political propaganda,"<sup>27</sup> according to the doctrine that Egypt "as a revolution" would not maintain the territorial boundaries of Egypt "as a state."<sup>28</sup> As a result, in Libya, as elsewhere in the Arab world, Egyptian high-skilled professionals were subject to frequent deportations as a result of their political activism.<sup>29</sup> The overarching political character of such emigration is further stressed by the fact that most of these emigrants' wages abroad were paid by the Egyptian government rather than the host states.<sup>30</sup> Nasser's concern regarding mass emigration is also evident in the numerous

measures he adopted and resources he devoted to prevent such movements in his earlier years,<sup>31</sup> while governmental reports further show how the regime would later consider emigration as a solution to Egypt's problem of 'astronomical' overpopulation.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout his tenure as president, Nasser would rarely publicly discuss the issue of migration. The Egyptian state never released details concerning the emigration of Egyptian Jews; rather, one has to rely on private accounts or the reports of international organizations. State statistics on the departure of Egyptian Copts are, similarly, unavailable. This lacuna comes in sharp contrast with a long history of state record keeping in Egypt, and the otherwise detailed statistical accounts collected and methodically published by the state under Nasser. Even the word diaspora (*al-shatāt*) has been, to this day, largely shunned in official rhetoric due to its association with the creation of the Israeli state.<sup>33</sup> Instead, if asked about migration, Nasser would brush it off, often stating that "Egyptians don't migrate."<sup>34</sup> In doing so, he generalized upon the long-standing belief in the Egyptian *fallāhīn*'s (farmers') attachment to the land and their "state of apathy" towards emigration, a belief that traces its roots to the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Of course, the phenomena of internal migration and urbanization in Egypt throughout the twentieth century—let alone the population movements listed above—had long debunked the validity of this myth. Yet, as the political act of migration (or, more precisely, the dismissal of migration as an act) became associated with a distinct field of meaning, the belief in an "attachment to the land" was made credible within the Nasserist social order.

The plausibility of this narrative relied upon a strong degree of association and cohesion with the regime's overall ideology. Behind Nasser's public assertions that "everybody knows that Egyptians do not like to emigrate,"<sup>36</sup> the President constructed a broader belief system about the duties, rights, and expected conduct of a citizen. The belief system operated in line with other frames of reference, particularly Egyptian nationalism coupled with distrust of "reactionary" neighboring countries and the two Cold War superpowers, and a statist-developmental program whose success relied on ample domestic manpower. At the same time, normative guidelines were put in place that omitted migration from subjects' repertoire of action: the rejection of migration attained a moral weight as the broad demonization of migratory movements ultimately enabled life outside of Egypt to be presented as a type of punishment. The regime would duly publicize how it stripped

communists, members of the Muslim Brotherhood, or other “traitors to the state” of their Egyptian nationality, barring their return to the country.<sup>37</sup>

The discourse on migration, in effect, allowed Nasser to “construct” the citizen, individually and collectively, around the regime’s broader ideational priorities. On an individual level, the President would repeatedly demonize any cases of greed or corruption, discouraging the self-interested pursuit of profit in favor of collective concern for the state.<sup>38</sup> This was the explicit rationale behind Nasser’s policy of *taklif* (mandatory work), which forbade migration of specific professions, until one had been employed within Egypt for a set number of years. More broadly, Nasser would applaud practices that discouraged consumerism, thereby delineating Egyptian citizens’ fields of action within specified parameters of socio-political disposition. Overall, a citizen who wished to migrate came to contradict the oft-stated principles of autarky and frugality upon which the Nasserist regime relied:

There are certain notions which should be discarded like extravagance and luxury. Today I would like to say a thing or two about extravagance. Every pound we save in constructing a factory contributes to the national wealth and, by increasing these savings, we can build another factory and thus provide, for example, one hundred individuals with work [...] No one should think only of himself. Those of us who lead a comfortable life do so at the expense of others.<sup>39</sup>

On a collective level, the perceived absence of migration helped pave the way for the establishment of “the new society;” one, the regime argued, that was being “built along the lines of a democratic, cooperative socialism. The principal aims of the government are to raise the standard of living, and to afford equal opportunities to all citizens.”<sup>40</sup> The lack of emigration, the regime argued, mirrored a sound economic policy. Put differently, there was no need to move abroad given the ample employment opportunities within Egypt. “Ours is not a poor state, brothers, but a rich one,” Nasser would emphasize.<sup>41</sup> In associating the lack of migration with state development, the regime associated the act of emigration with a lack of belief in the Nasserist state, or a wish to undermine it. Complementary government policies entrenched the absence of migration within broader modes of action: the Land Reform Law, for instance, discouraged migration by providing ample work opportunities for Egyptian farmers. Nasser’s 1964 *siyāsāt al-ta’yīn* (graduate appointment policy), which stipulated that the state would provide public sector



employment for every Egyptian citizen who graduates from university, further undermined economic incentives for emigration.<sup>42</sup>

Overall, despite the fact that population movements were not only visible by, but highly disruptive to Egyptian society, the regime discursively downplayed such movements in delineating the framework in which political subjects were encouraged to participate. Thus, the regime's approach to migration shaped subjects' conceptions of meaningful political participation and, introduced a degree of disconnect between the "model" Egyptian citizen and those who had left the country. Remaining in Egypt, in other words, *made sense*, whereas emigrating largely did not. Indications of the regime's success in making this discourse hegemonic can be found in the commonly held view, still promoted today, that Egyptians did not emigrate under Nasser, and that view's routine reproduction in the relevant scholarship as a broader truth,<sup>43</sup> further obscuring the socio-political importance of population movements that occurred during Nasser's reign.<sup>44</sup>

As a result, this period's diverse population movements have essentially been relegated into aberrations, or unintentional mishaps, hindering their examination as part and parcel of the regime's production of power. More importantly, the Nasserist regime was able to morally justify its restriction of subjects' repertoire of actions, by putting forth social norms that it professed to be more important than individual freedom: "When will Egyptians [...] be permitted to travel freely abroad [?]" an American journalist asked Nasser in 1959. "When we have a surplus of foreign currencies which we can spend on luxury and on summer vacations in Europe and America," he replied tersely.<sup>45</sup>

#### EGYPTIAN EMIGRATION AND THE NEOLIBERAL SUBJECT UNDER PRESIDENTS SADAT AND MUBARAK, 1970-2011

*'[The President] dressed in the latest fashion while we slept ten in a room.'*  
Slogan of the 1977 "Bread Riots"<sup>46</sup>

By September 1969, Nasser had decided to completely abolish emigration, suspending all exit permits.<sup>47</sup> His successor, however, saw matters differently: Anwar Sadat introduced migration into the Egyptian subject's repertoire of political action in 1971—a year after he assumed the presidency, following Nasser's death. The new President proceeded to abolish the long tradition of exit visas, border controls, and other restrictions,<sup>48</sup> while he negotiated

bilateral agreements that would allow Egyptians entry to foreign countries such as Libya or Syria with any official document of identification.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the press ran frequent articles about “an increased demand for Egyptian manpower” abroad.<sup>50</sup> Newspapers would duly list foreign countries’ labor shortages that were to be filled by Egyptians: “2,500 Egyptian building workers leave for Bulgaria;”<sup>51</sup> “15,000 workers for Czechoslovakia,”<sup>52</sup> and so on—statements of profound importance given the dire economic conditions within Egypt.

The regime now rejected Egyptians’ attachment to the land as an “old stereotype.”<sup>53</sup> Wage differentials between Egypt and foreign countries were widely publicized—schoolteachers, for instance, earned more in four years’ work in the Gulf than in their entire working life if they stayed in Egypt.<sup>54</sup> By 1978, one account estimated that 15 to 18 percent of Egypt’s active workforce was employed abroad.<sup>55</sup> As the regime stated in its five-year plan:

Growing numbers of Egyptians work abroad for very high wages, if compared with domestic salaries. These individuals return to Egypt possessed of high purchasing powers, which they usually direct not to saving and investment but to flagrant and luxurious consumption [...] Therefore, our manpower and resources must be planned to meet the prerequisites of progress for trained manpower, and supply trained personnel to the Arab countries.<sup>56</sup>

In this rupture with past practices, the Sadat regime replaced Nasser’s pseudo-historic repertoires about Egyptians’ attachment to the land with a sustained language of liberalization. This was made clear by the inclusion of the right to migration in the 1971 Constitution: Article 52 stipulated that “citizens shall now have the right to permanent or temporary migration.”<sup>57</sup> In the past, as Sadat wrote, Egyptians were “turned into puppets. They became dummies in the hands of their rulers, who did with them as they pleased. People were not allowed to travel [...]”<sup>58</sup> Now, however, a subject’s repertoire of actions was to be guided by freedom. “I want to make it clear,” Sadat repeatedly argued, “that if we do not hold to the complete freedom of the individual in the shadow of competition, we cannot realize any progress. He who wants to travel, let him travel.”<sup>59</sup> In line with the shift towards freedom of movement, the state retreated from administering any effective control over emigration, including keeping count of emigration-related statistics.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the Sadat regime was able to grossly inflate estimates of Egyptians abroad,

further fueling social pressure towards emigration.<sup>61</sup> Already in 1971, Sadat would publicly boast that “there had never been as many young people migrating as there have been this year.”<sup>62</sup> Without official statistics, figures became exaggerated, as state officials would broadly refer to “millions” of workers living abroad. In 1978, for instance, while the International Labor Organization estimated 403,908 Egyptian emigrants to be working in Arab countries, *al-Ahram* put the number to 1,390,000.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time, to sustain this radical shift towards migration, particularly to the oil-rich Arab countries, Sadat also drew upon an ethical repertoire hedged around the issue of religion.<sup>64</sup> The new President presented himself as the *al-ra'is al-mu'min* (the pious president); rarely would his speeches not begin, or end, with a reference to the Qur'an, while state media began duly reporting the mosques where Sadat would perform his Friday prayers. The importance of religiously conservative Arab countries—mainly Saudi Arabia—for Egypt's future was highlighted in newspapers, with reports repeating how Egyptian manpower and Saudi wealth could complement each other for mutual benefit. Egypt's military victory against Israel in 1973, with the help of the oil embargo imposed by neighboring Arab countries, was contrasted with the defeat of Nasser's Egypt in 1967, further normalizing the centrality of oil-rich Arab countries to Egypt's new social order. Sadat promised that the 1973 War—or the “crossing of the Canal”—would be followed by Egypt's “second crossing, the crossing to prosperity.”<sup>65</sup> Egyptian migration, in this context, would also be a gesture of help towards the Saudi state's large demand for labor, and would add to the intended interdependence between the two countries. This, for Sadat, was a matter of pride: the President was initially adamant on naming one of the Suez Canal districts after the Saudi King.<sup>66</sup> In his reconciliation with the Gulf states, the President also made clear that the state was now willing to receive all “her sons” who had been forced to reside abroad, and reinstate Egyptian citizenship to them—marking the return of Muslim Brothers who had escaped to the Gulf and had been stripped of their nationality by Nasser.<sup>67</sup>

This shift in discourse radically modified Egyptian citizens' repertoire of political behavior according to the new regime's priorities. On an individual level, the return of religiously radical elements that had emigrated under Nasser marked a steady shift towards conservatism in universities, professional associations, and, gradually, in the overall sociopolitical landscape of Egypt. At the same time, migration to Saudi Arabia was normalized through the Egypt-Saudi rapprochement: “Recall the writings of [philosopher] Ibn Khaldun,” one

interviewee argued, “who wrote that the defeated eventually imitates the victor: the *Naksa* [Egypt’s defeat or, literally, ‘setback,’ in the 1967 War], on one side and the importance of oil from the conservative Gulf in the [1973] Ramadan War, on the other, explains the allure of Saudi Arabia for Egyptians in the 1970s, and their rejection of Nasserism.” Ostentatious piety was the Egyptian subjects’ reaction to religious practices of power introduced across the entire social body: this pressure was magnified through patterns of conspicuous consumption among return migrants from the Gulf, complementing the President’s own, widely reported penchant for extravagance.<sup>68</sup> Interviewees would easily recall, some forty years later, the finely made, and conservative, clothing that migrants wore upon their return to Egypt in the late 1970s, or their imported record players, blasting Qur’anic recitations in the evenings—both serving as simultaneous indications of lavishness and piety.<sup>69</sup>

Gradually, the Sadat regime introduced status hierarchies that, predicated upon the question of migration, were to become bases of social discrimination and exclusion. This shift targeted schoolchildren, not only adults: Egyptian school curricula now taught that “people emigrate, just like the birds,”<sup>70</sup> while the 1977 preparatory school certificate exam asked students to write an essay on “the joys of a person who could obtain work in an ‘Arab’ country, thus managing to accumulate money and return home to start a new life.”<sup>71</sup> From November 1971 onwards, the first son of an Egyptian emigrant would not be drafted into military conscription, nor would his brother if they were orphans.<sup>72</sup>

How these practices of power came to be deployed at the micro-level of everyday life has been most obvious in one of the central tenets of Egyptian life, marriage, which became intertwined with emigration and return. While, under Nasser, renting a new apartment was easily attainable for newlywed couples, Sadat deregulated rent controls, and shifted the state’s priorities towards home ownership.<sup>73</sup> The social expectation of moving into a new apartment—a near-necessity for any newly married Egyptian couple—became predicated upon sufficient prior savings for the hefty down-payment. New apartments’ soaring prices (due, in part, to Egypt’s urbanization and overpopulation issues), together with the rising costs of furnishing an apartment, entrenched migration into the normative frames of young Egyptians’ quotidian lives. Whereas in the pre-1970 period, Egyptians could afford to get married after a couple of years of public sector employment, Egyptians after Sadat now either choose to emigrate or, if they remain in Egypt, accept being unable to marry for the foreseeable future.

Thus, the traditional social expectation that the prospective couple must save a certain amount of money so as to move into a new home after the wedding is now achievable primarily through work abroad. As a result, young return migrants tend to be highly sought after as bridegrooms. A prospective groom's status as a returnee from the Gulf countries (or, pre-2011, from Libya) is typically highlighted in social interactions, contributing to his valorization as a financially successful and, at the same time, pious Egyptian. Through marriage, relations of power that involve the act of migration become materially grounded in the local setting. Egyptians who have secured a position of work abroad also enjoy a dominant role under these social conditions; in that case, an engagement takes place, following which the fiancé departs for abroad, where he saves money for a few years before he returns to his new home, and family, in Egypt. Periodic journeys abroad for additional employment are not rare.<sup>74</sup>

Collectively, the regime's discourse on migration highlighted the shift towards individualism and de-politicization.<sup>75</sup> Every Egyptian citizen, Sadat would argue repeatedly, has the right to "get married, own a villa, drive a car, possess a television set and a stove, and eat three meals a day."<sup>76</sup> The socioeconomic autarky professed under Nasser was duly replaced as the Sadat regime shifted towards economic liberalization, a trend that would be intensified under Mubarak's turn to neoliberalism.<sup>77</sup> Stressing this even further, Sadat introduced Presidential Decree No. 73 in 1971, allowing Egyptians who had emigrated to regain their old civil service position in Egypt within a year, if they were unsuccessful in finding employment abroad—a period later expanded to three years.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, newspapers featured articles lauding the success of Egyptians abroad. In one instance, Ali Amin, editor of *al-Akhbar* wrote:

Egypt's youthful skills have stolen the limelight and come to be the country's staple crop. Some of them get higher salaries than [US Secretary of State, 1973–77] Dr. Henry Kissinger and [UK Prime Minister, 1974–76] Harold Wilson while still in their forties. Some lead the same lavish life as Hollywood stars. They own villas with fragrant gardens and as many as three cars each. One of them travels by private helicopter from his country home to his place of work inside New York! But our country will not lose the brains we export to the outside world. For a successful Egyptian must be back home one day

to drink again from the Nile and to live with the generous people. An Egyptian travels but does not go for good, for he always returns.<sup>79</sup>

Gradually, with the extension of market rationality into every aspect of life, Egyptian citizens were constructed as entrepreneurial subjects, and any preoccupation with formal politics became largely irrelevant. Instead, they became obsessed with waiting for *dawuruhum* (their turn) to move abroad.<sup>80</sup> Migration came to be associated with fast profits of dubious origin, as Egyptians began debating the issues of the *quṭaṭ sumān* (fat cats)—numerous Egyptians who had grown mysteriously rich, mysteriously fast, including the members of the President’s family who were later convicted of economic crimes.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, migration aided in fulfilling a chief policy goal under Sadat, which he termed the ending of *al-hiqd* (rancor) in domestic politics. As long as the option to pursue employment abroad remained, the inefficiency of the Egyptian state could afford to be taken for granted, and existing power structures would remain unchallenged. Even one of the most controversial decisions of Egyptian foreign policy, the 1979 peace treaty with Israel which resulted in Arab states’ economic embargo on Egypt, was presented in the Egyptian media together with front-page reports that Egyptian emigration routes would not be threatened, and that Arab states would continue to receive Egyptian workers.<sup>82</sup> “Egypt,” Sadat once mentioned to Kissinger, “needed no more heroes.”<sup>83</sup>

Put differently, with ‘exit’ being an option, Egyptians rarely ‘voiced’ demands at the Sadat and Mubarak regimes.<sup>84</sup> The massive January 1977 ‘Bread Riots,’ partially based on the growing perception of inequality between a small section of society (who had profited from migratory processes) and the masses (which had not) was one of the last major mass protests in Egypt for more than thirty years.<sup>85</sup> The regime attempted to secure legitimacy by “claiming to provide for the well-being of the population,”<sup>86</sup> as Mubarak argued that the decision to protest should be weighed against its potential monetary cost. Mubarak would shun responsibility, as neoliberal policy professed that Egyptians should worry about their job or, as Mubarak would frequently argue, “go back to work” (and, essentially, pursue employment abroad) rather than worry about politics.<sup>87</sup> In response to those Egyptians who protested, Mubarak publicly argued, *mish bitū’ shughl* (they are not the working type). Even the few notable resistance movements that did emerge,

such as the *Kifāya* (Enough), or the Egyptian Movement for Change, were mostly elite-led projects rather than bottom-up campaigns.

Overall, through social norms and expectations, the Egyptian regime under Sadat and Mubarak refocused subjects' fields of action around the issue of migration. Having succeeded in normalizing migration as a political act since the early 1970s, the regime proceeded to tie it to specific meanings—freedom, piety, individualism, and neoliberal de-politicization—and shape citizens' engagement with power around them. As writer Anis Mansour encapsulates in *al-Akhbar*:

[...] an Egyptian was looked upon as the man with the 'ugly face' throughout the Arab world. For twenty years, every Egyptian had seemed to turn into a spy or saboteur. Every Egyptian teacher was thought to have come to overthrow the standing rule and to distribute subversive literature. Every Egyptian doctor was considered a spy acting for Egyptian Intelligence Service to set one class against another. [...] Now he is not interested in other peoples' own affairs. 'Give and take' is his motto. By doing so he came to have a handsome face.<sup>88</sup>

## CONCLUSION

*'The days when a citizen living abroad was regarded with suspicion, as if he had not fulfilled his national duties, are over... We must all guarantee, in deeds and not in words, that an Egyptian working abroad is a good citizen, who has not renounced his identity.'*

Hosni Mubarak, Speech to Egyptian Expatriates' Meeting, 1983<sup>89</sup>

This paper explored how approaching migration as a political act within a community sheds light onto the effects of cross-border population mobility upon migrants' countries of origin. Specifically, it examined how processes related to migration are embedded in both governmental practices and social norms of interaction, and how these processes affect the subject. In this reading, migration is deeply entrenched within different structures of power; the act of migration arguably signifies less an act that affirms agency, or the subject's sovereignty, than a deeper entrenchment of the subject within social norms and practices, as well as within the governmental techniques of power that govern and delineate conduct. In this sense, migration carries moral weight, designating the field within which political participation takes on meaning.

In examining population movements in the empirical case of the post-1952 modern Egyptian state, the paper traces how migration discursively supported the Egyptian regime, both under Nasser and under Sadat and Mubarak. The divergent ideological priorities of each period were duly reflected upon migration: the citizen as a migrant was, in the first case, demonized and, in the second, praised. Thus, social expectations, in tandem with formal governmental policies, contributed to different definitions of citizenship—the Egyptian citizen was constructed as a self-sustained, frugal subject under Nasser, and as a ‘free,’ profit-seeking subject under Sadat and Mubarak. In either of these cases, migration as an act became firmly embedded within a broader, socially constituted frame of reference that distinguished between the migrant and the non-migrant subject, and defined citizens’ engagement with political power.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On political participation, see: S. P. Huntington and J. M. Nelson, *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); N. Nielson and S. Wright, eds., *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995). For an analysis of the Middle Eastern context, see C. Tripp, "Acting and Acting Out: Conceptions of Political Participation in the Middle East," in *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices*, in M. Freeden and A. Vincent, ed. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Lewis, *Louis Althusser and the Traditions of French Marxism* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Indicatively: G. Amin and E. Awni, *Hijrat al-‘Amalat al-Misriyya: Dirasa Naqdiyya li-l-Buhuth wa-l-Dirasat al-Khasa bi-Hijrat al-‘Amalat al-Misriyya ila al-Kharij* [in Arabic] (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Indicatively: N. Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> The Sadat and Mubarak regimes are examined together given that no notable qualitative change in Egypt’s emigration policy is detected: Sadat had picked Mubarak to be his successor, and the latter pledged to uphold key policy aspects, while also maintaining most of his predecessor’s advisors. On this aspect, see G. Amin, *Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak: 1981-2011* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 57.



- <sup>6</sup> The emphasis of the analysis on the Egyptian President is due to the traditional centrality of this figure in the decision-making power structures in Egypt. See B. Korany and A. E. H. Dessouki, eds., *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, 3rd ed., (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2008), 40-41.
- <sup>7</sup> For a discussion of conducting fieldwork on migration policies in non-democracies, see: G. Tsourapas, "Notes from the Field: Researching Emigration in post-2011 Egypt," *American Political Science Association Migration & Citizenship Newsletter* 2, no. 2 (2014).
- <sup>8</sup> F. Ragazzi, "Governing Diasporas," *International Political Sociology* 3 no. 4 (2009); B. Mullan and C. Doña-Reveco, "Emigration and the Sending State," in *The International Handbook of Migration Studies*, in S. Gold and S. Nawyn, eds. (London: Routledge, 2012); M. Collyer, ed., *Emigration Nations: Policies and Ideologies of Emigrant Engagement* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> Kapur, for instance, argues that migration includes four "channels," namely prospect, absence, diaspora, and return. *Diaspora, Development, and Democracy: The Domestic Impact of International Migration from India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).
- <sup>10</sup> E Morawska, "Disciplinary Agendas and Analytic Strategies of Research on Immigrant Transnationalism: Challenges of Interdisciplinary Knowledge," *International Migration Review* 37, no. 3 (2003).
- <sup>11</sup> L. Bonnefoy, *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and Religious Identity* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011); M. Cooke and B. B. Lawrence, eds., *Muslim Networks: From Hajj To Hip Hop* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
- <sup>12</sup> T. Lyons and P. G. Mandaville, *Politics from Afar* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011).
- <sup>13</sup> P. Levitt and D. Lamba-Nieves, "Social Remittances Revisited," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010).
- <sup>14</sup> N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 5. Cf. M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*, 2nd ed (London: Sage, 2010).
- <sup>15</sup> S. Ismail, "Authoritarian Government, Neoliberalism and Everyday Civilities in Egypt," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (2011), 864.
- <sup>16</sup> A. Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making: Immigrants Negotiate Racial and Cultural Boundaries in the United States," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 5, (1996); S. B. Coutin, *Nations of Emigrants: Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in El Salvador and the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).
- <sup>17</sup> R. M. Rodriguez and H. Schwenken, "Becoming a Migrant at Home: Subjectivation Processes in Migrant-Sending Countries Prior to Departure," *Population, Space and Place* 19, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>18</sup> On the Middle East context, see L. A. Brand, *Citizens Abroad: Emigration and the State in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> See “Egypt Deporting Enemy Nationals,” *The New York Times*, 25 November 1956; “1,000 Jews Join Exit from Egypt,” *The New York Times*, 23 January 1957. Also: G. Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2011), 192-215.

<sup>20</sup> *Arab Observer*, 5 October 1964.

<sup>21</sup> E. Podeh, *The Decline of Arab Unity: The Rise and Fall of the United Arab Republic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 55, 113; J. Ferris, *Nasser’s Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 83, 185.

<sup>22</sup> CAPMAS, *al-Kitab al-Ihsa’i al-Sanawi* [in Arabic] (Cairo: Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, 1965), 140-42. G. Tsourapas, “Nasser’s Educators and Agitators across *al-Watan al-‘Arabi*: Tracing the Foreign Policy Importance of Egyptian Regional Migration, 1952-1967,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>23</sup> “Nasser is Seeking to Hold Students,” *The New York Times*, 28 August 1966.

<sup>24</sup> P. J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt*, 4th ed., (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 431-32; R. A. Ahmed, “Egyptian Migrations,” in *Migration, Immigration and Emigration in International Perspective*, in L. L. Adler and U. P. Gielen, eds., (London: Praeger, 2003), 312.

<sup>25</sup> E. Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt: Coptic Media, Identity and Representation*, Routledge studies in Middle Eastern politics (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> UAR Information Department, *President Gamal Abd el-Nasser on Africa* (Cairo: UAR Information Department, [n.d]), 67.

<sup>27</sup> The National Archives [TNA], CF/P6/681/1, “Persian Gulf.” See also “Egyptian Teachers as Agents,” *The Times*, 25 November 1958, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Y. Oron, ed., *Middle East Record* (Israel Universities Press, 1962), 632.

<sup>29</sup> See G. Tsourapas. “The Politics of Egyptian Migration to Libya.” Middle East Report and Information Project, 2015, accessed 6 February, 2017, <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero031715>.

<sup>30</sup> UAR Information Department, *Al-Ta’lim al-‘Ali fi al-‘Am al-Hadi ‘Ashir li-l-Thawra* [in Arabic] (Cairo: UAR Information Department, 1963).

<sup>31</sup> These obstacles to emigration were well known. For a detailed description, see *Al-Jumhuriya*, 24 June 1971.

<sup>32</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 25 November 1966 and 31 October 1967.

<sup>33</sup> Personal Interview, Dr. Nahed Ashry (Minister, Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and Migration), 24 February 2014.

<sup>34</sup> On this tradition in pre-1952 Egypt, see W. Cleland, *The Population Problem in Egypt: A Study of Population Trends and Conditions in Modern Egypt* (Lancaster, PA: Science Press Printing Company, 1936), 52.

- <sup>35</sup> For Issawi, Egyptians are some of “the most sedentary people in the world.” *Egypt in Revolution: An Economic Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 82. See also G Baer, *Population and Society in the Arab East* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1964), 28.
- <sup>36</sup> *Al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi*, January 7, 1963, 26.
- <sup>37</sup> *Al-Jumhuriya*, 14 September 1954 and 15 September 1954.
- <sup>38</sup> On this aspect of Nasser, see G. Amin, *Egypt in the Era of Hosni Mubarak: 1981-2011*, 30-34.
- <sup>39</sup> UAR Information Department, *Nasser's Speeches and Press - Interviews* (Cairo: UAR Information Department, 1958), 246-47.
- <sup>40</sup> *Al-Kitab al-Sanawi* [in Arabic] (Cairo: UAR Information Department, 1959), 20.
- <sup>41</sup> *Nasser's Speeches and Press - Interviews* (Cairo: UAR Information Department, 1959).
- <sup>42</sup> See R. W. Baker, *Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 197-217.
- <sup>43</sup> See, for instance, N. Choucri, “The New Migration in the Middle East: A Problem for Whom?” *International Migration Review* 1, no. 4 (1977), 5-6.
- <sup>44</sup> Almost all my interviewees insisted that Egyptians did not move abroad under Nasser; only when pressed about specific population groups did a more elaborate discussion take place about Nasser’s migration policy.
- <sup>45</sup> UAR Information Department, *Nasser's Speeches and Press - Interviews*, 1959, 388.
- <sup>46</sup> In Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, the words *mōḍa* (fashion) and *ōḍa* (room) rhyme. The line above is part of a longer popular song.
- <sup>47</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 5 July 1970.
- <sup>48</sup> *Al-Jumhuriya*, 29 March 1974; *Al-Ahram*, 15 May 1974.
- <sup>49</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 18 October 1971; *Al-Ahram*, 15 December 1971.
- <sup>50</sup> *Al-Jumhuriya*, 3 March 1974.
- <sup>51</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 10 January 1972.
- <sup>52</sup> *Al-Jumhuriya*, 6 February 1972.
- <sup>53</sup> J. Waterbury, “Egyptian Elite Perceptions of the Population Problem,” *Fieldstaff Reports: Africa: Northeast Africa Series* (Hanover, N.H.: American Universities Field Staff, 1973), 11-12.
- <sup>54</sup> For a broader discussion of this issue, see N. Ayubi, *The State and Public Policies in Egypt Since Sadat*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1991).
- <sup>55</sup> R. A. Ahmed, “Egyptian Migrations,” 322.
- <sup>56</sup> Ministry of Planning, *Planning for Economic Development in Egypt* (Cairo: Ministry of Planning, 1978), 8, 36.
- <sup>57</sup> Arab Republic of Egypt, *Dustur Jumhuriyat Misr al-‘Arabiyya* [in Arabic] (Cairo: Ministry of Information, 1971), Article 52.
- <sup>58</sup> A Sadat, *al-Baḥth ‘an al-Dhat* [in Arabic] (Cairo, Modern Egyptian Library, 1978), 289.

- <sup>59</sup> Quoted in M. N. Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 97.
- <sup>60</sup> Personal Interview, Mr. Kareem Amin (Head of Cabinet, Department of Consular Affairs and Egyptians Abroad, Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs); 20 February 2014.
- <sup>61</sup> J. S. Birks, C. A. Sinclair, and J. Socknat, "The Demand for Egyptian Labor Abroad," in *Migration, Mechanization, and Agricultural Labor Markets in Egypt*, in A. Richards and P. L. Martin, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 117.
- <sup>62</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 10 October 1971.
- <sup>63</sup> G. Feiler, *The Number of Egyptian Workers in the Arab Oil Countries, 1974-1983: A Critical Discussion* (Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Shiloah Institute, Tel Aviv University, 1986), 11.
- <sup>64</sup> Personal Interview, Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim (Director, Ibn Khaldun Center); 21 October 2013.
- <sup>65</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 30 August 1974.
- <sup>66</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 1 August 1974; *al-Akhbar*, 4 August 1974.
- <sup>67</sup> *Al-Jumhuriya*, 9 March 1974.
- <sup>68</sup> R. Israeli, "Man of Defiance: A Political Biography of Anwar Sadat," (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 6-12.
- <sup>69</sup> The Egyptian "Islamic Revival" has been extensively researched in anthropology. Indicatively, see C. Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009). For two classic sociological accounts, see G. Amin, "Migration, Inflation and Social Mobility: A Sociological Interpretation of Egypt's Current Economic and Political Crisis," in *Egypt under Mubarak*, in C. Tripp and R. Owen, eds., (London: Taylor & Francis, 1989); S. E. Ibrahim, *The New Arab Social Order: A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press), 1982.
- <sup>70</sup> *Al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi*, No. 745, 1983.
- <sup>71</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 18 May 1977.
- <sup>72</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 26 December 1971.
- <sup>73</sup> See M. Hanna, *Uridu Maskanan: Mushkilah Lana Hall* [in Arabic] (Cairo: Ruz al Yusuf Foundation, 1978).
- <sup>74</sup> Egyptian emigration to the Arab world has been historically male-dominated. For an anthropological discussion of this phenomenon, see F. Ghannam, *Live and Die Like a Man: Gender Dynamics in Urban Egypt* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press), 2013.
- <sup>75</sup> For a broader discussion on this see, G. Tsourapas, "Why Do States Develop Multi-Tier Emigrant Policies: Evidence from Egypt," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41, no. 13 (2015).
- <sup>76</sup> Quoted in *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 29. Very similar statements were made in President Sadat's two-hour interviews on Egyptian

television, reproduced in their entirety in *al-Ahram*, 26 December 1979 and 26 December 1980.

<sup>77</sup> T. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 272-303.

<sup>78</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 10 October 1971.

<sup>79</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 30 June 1975.

<sup>80</sup> See S. Ibrahim, *Zaat* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2004).

<sup>81</sup> For a personal description of this phenomenon, from a close aide of Nasser and Sadat, see M. H. Haykal, *Kharif al-Ghadab: Qissat Bidayat wa-Nihayat 'Asr Anwar al-Sadat* [in Arabic] (Beirut: Tawzī Sharikat al-Matbū'āt, 1983).

<sup>82</sup> The front page headline of *Al-Jumhuriya* on 7 May 1979 for example reads, "No thoughts of withdrawing Egyptians working in Arab countries."

<sup>83</sup> H. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), 648.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. A. O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

<sup>85</sup> This, of course, does not deny the systematic repression of opposition under Mubarak. On this period, see A. Bayat, "Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 1, 1998.

<sup>86</sup> Quote from Chatterjee's broader discussion of the "governmentalization of the state." P. Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 34.

<sup>87</sup> On how similar arguments have been raised by other authoritarian regimes in the region, see G. Tsurapas, "The Other Side of a Neoliberal Miracle: Economic Reform and Political De-Liberalization in Ben Ali's Tunisia," *Mediterranean Politics* 18, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>88</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 13 March 1974.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in G. Feiler, *Economic Relations between Egypt and the Gulf States*, 107.