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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

Blooming through the Cracks:

The Case of Syrian Women in Egypt After 2011

A Thesis Submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

In partial fulfillment of requirements for

The degree of Master of Arts

In Migration and Refugee Studies

By

Ola Al Daieh

Under the Co-Supervision of Dr. Maysa Ayoub and Dr. Gerda Heck

August 2023

The American University in Cairo

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Abstract:

This study is conducted in 2023 and aims to understand the impact of displacement on Syrian women's involvement in the public sphere in Egypt. After the transition of the Syrian revolution into an armed conflict, Syrians witnessed a large wave of displacement, looking for safety away from their homeland. The research defines displacement as the movement of people who are forced to leave their place of residence. The focus is directed on the situation of Syrian women who were displaced to Egypt after 2011, and it proves the claims that there is an increase in women's engagement in the public sphere because of displacement. Moreover, this thesis aims to compare the level of civic engagement upon displacement to that happening prior to displacement. The fieldwork has been done with Syrian women and men in different locations in Cairo and Giza. It integrates their perceptions of women's role in the community during displacement within the research findings. This study was encouraged by the lack of studies highlighting women's and men's perceptions regarding women's experience in the public sphere in Egypt, especially after their displacement reached its twelfth year.

Table of Contents

I. Chapter One: Introduction 8

1. Overview 8

2. Research Problem 10

3. Conceptual Framework 11

3.1 Displacement 12

3.2 Public Sphere and Civic Engagement: 14

3.3 Civic Engagement 18

4. The Choice of Egypt 19

II. Chapter Two: Literature Review, Methodology, and Theoretical Framework 22

1. Literature Review 22

1.1 Women in Displacement 22

1.2 Syrian Women in Displacement 27

2. Methodology 44

3. Limitations 50

4. Theoretical Framework 51

III. Chapter Three: Arab Women and the Public Sphere 55

1. Arab Women and the Public Sphere: 55

2. The Syrian Women's Movement 59

3. The Egyptian Women's Movement..... 68

4. Analyzing the Difference Between the Syrian and Egyptian Women's Movements:... 78

IV. Chapter Four: Access to the Public Sphere 81

1. Participants' Profile..... 82

2. Engagement in Public Activities..... 83

2.1 Dealing with the Bureaucracy..... 83

2.2 Engagement in Community Work..... 90

2.2.1 Attending Activities by IOs, INGs, NGOs, and SLOs..... 90

2.2.2 Volunteering in Community Activities 92

2.2.3 Initiating Community Activities 97

2.3 Engagement in Paid Work..... 102

V. Chapter Five: Perception of the 'Self' and the 'Other' 107

1. The Perception of Women..... 107

2. The Perception of Men..... 114

2.1 The Profile of the Men Participating in The Study..... 115

2.2Men's Perception of Women's Increased Involvement in the Public Sphere 115

2.2.1 Dealing with the Bureaucracy..... 117

2.2.2 Volunteering and Civic Engagement..... 118

2.2.3 Paid Jobs 120

2.2 4 Overall Perception Regarding Changes in Women's Role: 122

VI. Conclusion And Recommendations..... 126

References..... 132

Appendix A: IRP Approval..... 161

Appendix B: Interview with Women..... 162

Appendix C: Interview with Men..... 164

Appendix D: Focus Group Discussion with Women..... 166

I. Chapter One: Introduction

1. Overview

Inspired by the political developments in Arab countries like Tunisia and Egypt, Syrians broke out in revolution in March 2011. Numerous internal reasons have contributed to the breakout of the Syrian revolution, notably vast bureaucratic and financial corruption and ignoring the general public's request for political, judicial, and legislative reformers that have been in demand since 2005 (Günther, 2019). The suppression policy that was adopted by Syrian authorities for more than 30 years rendered large-scale protests unexpected. The protest of 2011, as such, took the Syrian regime by surprise (Saleh & White, 2013). However, due to the violent reaction on the governmental level, peaceful protests transformed into armed ones and their influence expanded to all Syrian cities (Günther, 2019).

The outbreak of the Syrian armed conflict in March 2011 displaced millions of Syrians. According to the latest statistics of the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2022, 5.8 million Syrians sought asylum outside Syria and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicates that the number of internally displaced Syrians reached 9.2 million in 2021. As such, according to both UNHCR and OCHA, Syrians constitute the largest displaced population worldwide. In addition, according to UNHCR record, refugee women, including Syrian women, represent almost half of the refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2020).

Syrians mostly fled to neighboring countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey as well as to other Arab countries like Egypt. Citing UNHCR, Turkey hosts the largest number, with more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees registered by the Turkish Government. The breakdown of the number in the other Arab countries is as follows: Lebanon hosts 839,086 while Jordan has 674,458; Iraq has 258,965; and Egypt hosts 141,303 Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2022).

Although some countries, like Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq, have camps for refugees, most of the Syrian refugees settle in urban settings (UNHCR, 2021). For example, out of the 3.5 million Syrian refugees hosted by Turkey, only two percent live in camps (Adar et al., 2020). Lebanon adopted a 'no camp' policy for Syrians. Moreover, the Lebanese government has not considered Syrians, who fled the conflict, as refugees but rather as displaced people, and they were not offered legal protection. This "no camps" policy resulted in large numbers of Syrians renting places in urban settings or finding some agricultural land to build informal settlements (Sanyal, 2017). In Jordan, 13% of the total number of Syrian refugees are hosted in camps, while 87% are self-settled (Krafft et al., 2019). Regarding Egypt, the focus of this thesis, there is no policy of encampment, and all refugees are self-settled, mostly in urban centers.

Initially, most of the region's host countries adopted an open-door policy; however, because of the growing number of refugees, security concerns, economic challenges, and political changes, many of these countries later imposed restrictions on Syrian entry to their territories (Mencutek & Nashwan, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, UNHCR's record shows that women represent almost half of the refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2020). As such, examining the condition of women's displacement and its impact is important. While some of the literature on women refugees portrays them as "victims," "dependents," and "vulnerable," more recent literature focuses on refugee women's agency, highlighting that women's experience in displacement can lead to empowerment through a process of self-awareness.

The book "Women in Exile" by Mahnaz Afkhami, which was based on interviews with different groups of refugee women in different countries, indicated that the displacement experience impacts women differently. While it could shape the identity of some women and make them attentive to their rights, in other cases, the community in exile acts as an extension of the homeland community in terms of maintaining gender roles between men and women (Afkami, 1994). Some scholars attribute such differences to the context of the host country (Moussa, 1991). Accordingly, this thesis is driven by the interest in understanding the impact of the host country's political, legal, economic, and social context on how women experience displacement.

2. Research Problem

The objective of this thesis is to understand the effects of displacement on Syrian women, mainly as regards to their engagement in public life. The main research problem of this thesis is whether the experience of displacement has impacted the level of Syrian women's engagement in the public sphere, especially as relevant to Egypt, as a case study**.** The thesis aims at testing the proposition that displacement increases women's engagement in the public sphere.

3. Conceptual Framework

The thesis assumes a positive correlation between displacement and public engagement. In other words, it assumes that displacement leads to an increase in the level of engagement in the public sphere. Displacement can affect the sense of commitment and belonging to the community, which can lead to a desire to engage in the public issues affecting the community (Olivius, 2019). As such, the research investigates how Syrian women feel toward helping other Syrians and towards the political issues in Syria and how this sense of commitment increases with displacement. In addition, the social and political context of the host country can also impact the degree of engagement in the public sphere. Reasons related to the host country include the social and political context of the host country, the legal framework governing women's participation in the host country, gender norms in the host country, and the setting (urban or rural). As such, this research will investigate sub-questions, including the following:

- What is the demographic and geographical profile of most Syrian women in Egypt, viz., age, education, class, religion, and place of origin (rural or urban)?
- Does the legal framework in Egypt allow women to participate in the public sphere as compared to the legal framework in Syria?
- Both countries are Arab Muslim countries, but is there any cultural variation with regard to gender norms?

The remaining of this section provides a definition of the two variables used in this research, displacement and the public sphere.

3.1 Displacement

Displacement is a term that is usually used to describe the movement of people who were forced to leave their place of residence. As such, it is important to highlight the difference between voluntary and forced migration. It is the standpoint of Eisenstadt (1953) that 'migration' is the physical movement of an individual or a group from their set of social settings and entering a different one based on a previous decision. Based on Eisenstadt's definition of migration, one of the basic elements of migration is the 'free will' that proceeds the decision to migrate. Accordingly, the assumption is that migrants make the decision to move from their home country voluntarily, looking for better economic opportunities. This group of migrants is usually referred to as 'economic migrants.' While today, many individuals in the developing world are somehow forced to make the decision to migrate because of a lack of opportunities, the term 'Forced Migration' is usually used to refer to a totally different group of migrants. 'Involuntary Migration' (IM) or 'Forced Migration' (FM) is the situation of people who find themselves forced to leave their home country because of human-made or natural crises (IOM, 2021).

To elaborate more, economic migration commonly refers to the relocation of individuals from one location to another to improve social and economic circumstances or look for better environmental conditions. This type of migrants usually makes their decision to leave out of their free will. Their movement may occur within their home borders or across international borders, and this migration can be either temporary or permanent. Looking for better job opportunities, seeking family reunification, or desire for a better quality of life is the motivation for economic migration (IOM, 2021).

On the other hand, forced migration or forced displacement happens due to conflicts, persecution, environmental disasters, or other crises. Therefore, the movement of people who forcibly fled their homes and communities because of these crises is considered an involuntary movement. They are usually referred to in the literature as displaced persons. Those forcibly displaced people usually have almost no choice in the decision to move. In addition, they are more likely to be at risk of exploitation, violence, or deprivation during their displacement (MPI, 2015). Displacement refers to those who get displaced within their country, known as internal displacement, or to those who cross international borders. In the case of the latter, the person is referred to as an asylum seeker (UNHCR, 2021). According to the 1951 Convention, someone seeking asylum can be granted refugee status if he/she can prove a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or adoption of certain political opinion (*Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, n.d.)

Though it is not always the case, migration for economic reasons is usually perceived as more of a choice and voluntary action, while forced migration is based on a quick decision following an unpresentable situation or a sudden shock. Typically, economic migrants have the time to carefully plan for the move and carry savings and assets, whereas forced migrants have less time to be prepared for this move (Verme & Schuettler, 2021). Thus, economic migrants have the luxury of time and space to make the decision to migrate and leave their home country, while, in the case of displacement, people do not have the choice or the luxury of preparing to migrate and move physically from their set of social settings to a completely different one in a new country. They involuntarily make the decision to hastily migrate and escape their homes.

This thesis adopts the following definition for 'displacement,' that is, the involuntary movement of people who are forced to flee their home country and communities due to catastrophic causes like conflicts or persecution. As such, this thesis will focus on displaced Syrian women in Cairo. In other words, it will only focus on those who arrived in Egypt after the armed conflict that followed the Syrian Revolution of 2011, regardless of their registration status with the UNHCR. For that reason, the thesis is referring to them as displaced women rather than refugee/asylum seeker women to confirm that it will not only focus on the latter who are registered with UNHCR.

3.2 Public Sphere and Civic Engagement:

Initially, the development of the "Public Sphere" concept is attributed to the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. A detailed description of Habermas' work on the public sphere was published in Germany in 1962. It was only translated to and published in English in 1989 under the title "The Structural Transformation of Public Sphere: An Inquiry into Categories of Bourgeois Society." Habermas (1991) defines the "public sphere" as a discursive space where "private people" openly discuss matters of public concern. The public sphere, according to Habermas, is separated from public authorities and people's private lives, forming, as such, the idea of civil society. Habermas dates back the emergence of the public sphere to the 18th century in Europe. Habermas argues that, before the 18th century, there was no clear distinction between the private and public, or between the state and society because of the structure of social life in feudal times. The disappearance of feudal institutions, the growing power of the Bourgeoisie class, and the development of the press transformed social life in Europe.

According to Habermas, the 18th century was marked by the growth of coffee houses, salons, literary societies, and voluntary associations where political and social debates took place. Habermas believes that the quality of debates taking place in the public sphere mattered more than the identity of the participants. In addition, he stresses that the public sphere should give access to all community members regardless of social class; however, the Bourgeoisie dominated the public sphere in the 18th century. The Bourgeoisie represented the elite social class that was educated and had money to engage in political and social debate. As such, women and the working class were marginalized and excluded from the public sphere and public debates in 18th-century Europe. Moreover, the public sphere is depicted by Habermas as the domain where the idea of public opinion is formed. Public opinion is the end product presented in the public sphere by individuals who can do self-questioning and are capable of running rational discourse.

The press's importance at that time in transmitting the debate in the public sphere was one of the key ideas that Habermas mentions in his theory. He stressed that the press should reflect debates in the public sphere without being influenced by state or private interests. To put it together, according to Habermas, the rise of the Bourgeoisie class influenced the development of the public sphere. Before the Bourgeoisie, the public represented the lords and the voice of authority in the community. By the end of the 18th century, the term public represented the citizens' power that was formed in public. A public sphere is a place to which all citizens have access, and they all have the right of freedom to express their opinions. However, because the bourgeoisie dominated the sphere, certain groups were excluded, including women (Habermas, 1991).

Cohen (2013) argues that Habermas' theory fails to consider how gender and power intersect in the public sphere and criticizes Habermas' blindness to gender issues. Furthermore, Fraser (1990) highlights that historical records show that while women, ethnic minorities, and working-class members were excluded from participating in public discourses, they constituted alternative spheres. Habermas' work about the public sphere has inspired long and controversial debates (Calhoun, 1993). Habermas' theory has been subject to numerous criticisms over the years for many reasons. For the purpose of this thesis and as mentioned above, his theory was criticized for focusing on the elites and excluding women and marginalized groups, like people of color and members of the working class. Fraser (1990) describes it as 'elitist.' Moreover, Fraser (1990) argues that Habermas' theory assumes that the public sphere is a space where rational and informed citizens can engage in meaningful discourse, ignoring, as such, the fact that the equal access of citizens to information and resources differs between societies. Fraser (1990) argues that Habermas' theory overlooks the fact that powerful elites control access to information and resources and, as such, can dominate the public sphere (Fraser, 1990).

In the 18th century, women, ethnic minorities, and working-class people were largely excluded from participating in the public sphere due to class, material, and social conditions. Then, in the twentieth century, the limitation of access to the public sphere as a result of one's gender, class, or ethnicity gradually declined. However, these challenges were replaced by structural barriers, proving the weakness of Habermas' ideal theory about the public sphere. Fraser argues that Habermas' liberal model of a public sphere, which was initially tailored during the rise of the Bourgeoisie, cannot be applied in the modern world and its institutional democracy. Habermas calls for a single public sphere, accessible only to the elite in the community, to mediate between

society and the state. In contrast, Fraser stresses that the modern multiple public spheres represent the different categories in the community and denotes the "public sphere term" as referring to any space outside the family and the domestic sphere (Fraser 1990). Castells (2008) refers to the public sphere as a space where citizens can gather and articulate their views to influence the political institutions of society (Castells, 2008).

Due to the fact that Habermas' public sphere theory was developed in the 1960s, some argue that it is outdated. Technological changes, such as the internet and social media, have transformed the public sphere in ways that Habermas could not have anticipated (Alexey, 2018). Interestingly, some studies extend the usage of the public sphere to involve all the virtual communication channels we use nowadays to communicate and express people's opinions. As a result, marginalized groups in the community, like people of color, women, and religious and racial minorities, started to have platforms to express their opinions (Garnham, 1992). In other words, and as Alexey (2018) puts it, the rise of digital technologies has created new forms of public discourse not captured by Habermas' theory. Moreover, Castells (2008) argues that in light of globalization's effect on societies, a global public sphere has emerged. People's minds nowadays are affected by globalization. In other words, the public sphere today is largely dependent on the "global/local" media system.

Although Habermas has been criticized for his idealistic definition of the public sphere concept, the researcher believes that he has managed to reach a specific definition of the public sphere that differentiates it from the private sphere. This thesis adopts a definition of the public sphere as a space outside the realm of the home and the family, as well as the political realm. As

such, this thesis examines the degree to which Syrian women became engaged in the public space after displacement as compared to their engagement in the public space in Syria. By public space and public activities, the thesis means any activity that involves dealing with the public, including engagement in income-generating activities, dealing with the bureaucracy in terms of renewing residency permits or paying bills, etc.…, and engaging in community work.

3.3 Civic engagement

Some scholars perceive engagement in community work or 'civic engagement' broadly to include any activity by the individual for the community, from voting in political elections to giving money to charities (Berger, 2009), while others differentiate between "civic engagement" and "political participation" where the former refers to activities directed to the community while the later refer to participation in the polity (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). According to Adler and Goggin (2005), political participation includes, for example, voting, attending demonstrations, and joining political parties. Civic engagement refers to associational involvement and voluntary work in society outside the political domain. The latter is referred to by some scholars as the private domain and the former as the public domain. Putnam, the one who popularized the civic engagement concept, points out that it is important to highlight the idea of "engagement" rather than choose between the "civic" and the "political." As such, for Putnam, the term "civic engagement" covers almost everything, starting from political participation to reading newspapers (Putnam, 1992).

This thesis will use the narrow definition of civic engagement that focuses on engagement with the community outside the political domain. The thesis is interested in analyzing the extent to which Syrian women are engaged in activities outside their homes, the extent to which they are

involved in discussing social issues affecting the Syrian community in Egypt, and the extent to which such involvement is empowering them. As mentioned above, in order to understand the impact of displacement on Syrian women, this thesis aims to compare the level of civic engagement upon displacement to that happening prior to displacement when they were in Syria.

4. The Choice of Egypt

The impact of displacement on civic engagement would be better assessed outside a camp setting, as camps' settings strictly restrict the movement of individuals. Also, in a camp setting, humanitarian organizations usually provide assistance, and refugees are less involved in working together and assisting each other as compared to urban settings (Agier, 2002). Egypt represents a good case study compared to the neighboring countries hosting Syrians. For example, the very high percentage of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is creating tension over the limited resources. This tension is aggravated by religious sectarianism in Lebanon and worsened further by the current Lebanese economic crisis (Cherri et al., 2016). It follows that assessing the engagement of women in public issues in such a highly politically tense environment would be very difficult. Such difficulty led the researcher not to consider the case of Lebanon. The situation of Syrian refugees in Egypt, as compared to Turkey and Jordan, has also been documented as more successful. This could be attributed to their lower numbers in Egypt in both absolute and relative terms as compared to both Turkey and Jordan (Hassan, 2021).

Egypt received many waves of asylum seekers who ran away from the violence and the insecurity in Syria. One reason for coming to Egypt is the low cost of living. Moreover, many have family members living in Egypt and, consequently, decided to join their families. According to UNHCR statistics, the number of Syrian refugees in Egypt was 135,000 by October 2021, and they represent the highest number among the other refugee nationalities in Egypt (Kira et al., 2017). However, the total number of Syrians in Egypt is not exactly known as not all of them register with UNHCR. Their number was estimated at 250,000 to 300,000 Syrians who fled the forced conflict between 2011 and 2016 (Ahram, 2017).

Although Egypt hosts refugees from different nationalities, Egyptians are significantly more likely to cooperate with Syrians (Hassan, 2021). Studies indicate that Syrians in Egypt were better able to penetrate the labor market, and less tension has been observed between them and the local Egyptian population. As stated by Ayoub (2016), work is the primary income source for many Syrian families residing in Egypt. Most Syrians work in the informal sector because of the legal constraints of finding formal employment opportunities (ILO, 2018). Moreover, Syrians' access to the Egyptian labor market depends on the economic and educational backgrounds of each individual. For many Syrians, the food industry is the gate to the Egyptian labor market as the Egyptian population likes Syrian food (Hassan, 2021). However, higher-educated Syrians face more challenges in finding occupations that fit their level of education and expertise (Ayoub, 2016).

Nevertheless, Syrians' more successful integration into the Egyptian community makes Egypt a better case study for assessing the impact of displacement on women's civic engagement. While a comparative study of Egypt and one of the previously-mentioned countries, like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, would have enriched this research, the time factor constituted a limitation. It is hoped that the findings of this research will encourage other researchers to examine the issue in other countries.

II. Chapter Two: Literature Review, Methodology, and Theoretical Framework

This thesis focuses on the impact of displacement on women's participation in the public sphere. This chapter is divided into three sections in an attempt to serve the thesis' main aim. The first section is the literature review of women displacement, in general, and the situation of displaced Syrian women in the major receiving countries, in particular. The second section of the chapter will explain the methodology followed in the thesis and its limitations. Then, the last section will explain the theoretical framework of the thesis.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Women in Displacement

It is a traumatic experience to be forcibly displaced from the homeland, and most people who escape generalized violence or persecution face a serious threat to their safety and well-being. Literature proves that wars, conflicts, and political instability are the factors that force people to leave their homeland and establish a new life in new countries. Gaanderse (2013) argues that displacement affects gender roles and expectations. For instance, in many cases, women are forced to leave their homeland without their husbands. This means that many women take the responsibility of heading the households. As such, women take on more responsibilities and workloads than they used to take before displacement because of the new demands they get during the displacement (Gaanderse, 2013).

Once displaced, the level of women engagement in the community depends on whether displaced women are hosted in camps or urban settings. Camps' settings strictly restrict the movement of women compared to urban settings (Agier, 2002). The social, political, and economic context in displacement, compared to those in the home countries, represent the 'external factors that shape women's experience in displacement. Added to that are the 'internal factors', which are usually related to each woman's individual characteristics and how they perceive their social and gender roles in the home country and within the community. These internal factors interact with external factors and affect how women experience displacement. The following literature on women in displacement provides a variety of results about women's experiences in displacement. Some scholars highlight the positive impact of displacement on women, while other literature argues that such an experience is challenging and complicated.

The book "Women in Exile," by Mahnaz Afkhami, is an important reference as it explains the displacement experience of women from Middle Eastern countries who were resettled in the US. Such experience, the author argues, is not unified. Many of the women interviewed for the book highlighted that gender norms did not change with displacement as some of the displaced communities acted as an extension of the homeland community in terms of maintaining the distribution of gender roles between men and women, viz., females remained dependent on male figures. However, some women indicated that displacement impacted how they perceived their gender roles in the community. For example, a Palestinian interviewee stated that her displacement experience shaped her identity, feminist beliefs, and attention toward Palestinian women's issues. The Palestinian woman indicated that the displacement experience gave her a chance to evolve, shine, and be productive (Afkhami,1994).

On the other hand, Ross-Sheriff (2006), in her study of Afghani women, highlighted mainly the positive impact of displacement, showing how Afghan women managed to move from being hopeless victims, as the Western media represents them, to being social actors and using their social networks to overcome challenges within the new context of displacement. In the face of the challenges imposed by displacement, Afghani women developed strong coping mechanisms in Pakistan and managed to rebuild their lives while having faith and hope for a better life for themselves and their families. Ross-Sheriff (2006) highlighted in her research the importance of cultural sensitivity when studying the situation of displaced individuals. In other words, analyzing the experience of displacement should consider the cultural background of the displaced rather than judging such experience according to the standards of the researcher. For example, Ross-Sheriff argues that in Western culture, women's dependency on the social network in their community is not perceived positively as it is equated with a lack of independence. However, in the case of Afghani women's, the social networks helped them to move from being victims to being social and economic contributors in the community. Given the above, this source is particularly important for this research as it highlights the importance of being culturally sensitive. Analyzing the degree of women's empowerment cannot be properly measured without taking the cultural context into consideration.

Similarly, in an MA thesis submitted to the American University in Cairo, Dina Taha discussed the importance of cultural sensitivity by criticizing the focus on economic independence. Most studies, Taha, argues, limit women's empowerment to economic independence and the ability to have a job. Marriage in the context of displacement is usually perceived as a form of forced marriage. Syrian girls who got married in Egypt were stereotyped as subjected to forced marriage.

In her study with Syrians in Egypt, Taha interviewed Syrian women investigating their decision to marry. According to Taha's study, Syrian women's testimonies showed the agency behind their decision to get married, where one of the interviewed women explained that she chose marriage over demonstrating vulnerability to qualify for financial aid. Despite their economic and social vulnerability, they were able to navigate through the opportunity they had in their context and choose the best solution for them in light of the cultural concepts they believed in. Their decision to get married is perceived as an effective solution to promote their socio-economic interest at the same time, as a virtuous act that complements their existence in their community (Taha, 2021).

Much literature proves that forced displacement can create opportunities for women rather than a threat or challenge. For example, Olivius (2019) mentions that although Myanmar's military and civil war generated a severe humanitarian crisis, long-term displacement, and human suffering, displaced women managed to move from being marginalized to being activists. Refugee camps in Thailand's border with Myanmar represented how these camps manage to mobilize and empower the political movement of Myanmar women. This entails that the political structure in the host country is one of the external factors that affect Myanmar women's experience of displacement. Since the 1990s, a thriving, multiethnic women's movement has emerged in camps or the border towns between Thailand and Myanmar. In Myanmar, which was ruled by a military state, engaging in political opposition for Myanmar women was a risky business, and there was little room for civil society organizations. However, Myanmar women who have been displaced on the borderlines, particularly those close to the Thai-Myanmar borders, are offered better opportunities for political organization, mobilization, and interaction with the outside world in the host country.

Through their participation in administration and the provision of humanitarian aid in refugee camps, displaced Myanmar women activists have established themselves as political actors. As a result, this women's movement that started during the displacement managed to relocate their work to Myanmar after the military state was abolished in 2012 (Olivius, 2019). Furthermore, reforming gender roles is one of the internal factors that characterize Myanmar women's journey in displacement. Through their experience in displacement, Myanmar women have gained the trust of women leadership, even among men. Moreover, through the displacement experience and even after returning to Myanmar, women unprecedentedly managed to challenge male dominance compared to what they had before the displacement (Hedström, 2016).

Similarly, in the Guatemalan case, refugee camps became strategic sites for women and men's struggles to obtain their rights. A study by Pessar (2001) revealed that the new transitional context of women's gender roles in refugee camps allowed Guatemalan women to have an agency that enabled them to resist the forms of domination from the patriarchal community. Moreover, Guatemalan women formed a feminist organization called "Mama Maqufn," acknowledged their rights, and started to have the power to realize their capacity. In other words, displacement gave them agency to identify their own interest and facilitated their membership in a political coalition which broadened their citizenship and political awareness. Nonetheless, this newfound identity with the same gender and social role faced social rejection when they returned to the Guatemalan nation-state when Guatemalan men insisted on obtaining their patriarchal role where only men make decisions in the community (Pessar, 2001). The study attributed the challenges and shifts to men's desire to regain their traditional gender privileges and dominance. So, unlike the Myanmar

women, Guatemalan women faced challenges in remaining engaged with the community upon returning to their homeland.

In the same way, Callamard (2002) highlighted the refugee women's experience in camps. Callamard stated that women are marginalized at different levels, especially at the 'legal' level. This study is based on practical evidence from the experiences of refugee girls who face difficulties in accessing international services and protection in exile. Although there is a wide movement on the international level to maintain human rights, women refugees are still under discrimination and persecution. Callamard illustrated that social and gender norms affected lawmakers. Furthermore, the social role of women in the community as well is affected by the (gender-biased) relief programs that target women in displacement. The interaction of political, social, legal, and economic factors is reflected in fostering gender inequality. Another important source is the article, entitled "Unequal in Exile: Gender Equality, sexual identity, and refugee status" by Buscher. The article discusses the concept of gender equality and highlights the different socially-constructed roles of males and females. Buscher challenged the victimization of women and called for a possible solution to show women's resilience in displacement.

1.2 Syrian Women in Displacement

Most of the literature that tackled Syrian women in displacement focused at the beginning of the crisis on topics like sexual violence and reproductive health (Essaid et al., 2015; Kabakian et al., 2017; Krause et al., 2015; Masterson, 2013; Parker, 2015; Yasmine et al., 2016). As the crisis dwelled for years, other literature has emerged, talking about other topics such as integration,

livelihood, and social engagement (Bradley et al., 2022; Culcasi, 2019; Datta et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2017; Okyay, 2017; Thorne, 2021). This thesis is conducted twelve years after the outset of the Syrian problem, so it elaborates on the second type of literature that tackles the social engagement of Syrian women in displacement, giving general statistics about Syrians in each country, their economic and legal situation, and the Syrian women's activities in the public sphere. In the coming section, concentration will be directed to the position of displaced Syrian women in countries of the region that are hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees, mainly Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, the focus of this thesis.

Turkey:

Turkey shares a 911 Km borderline with Syria, and this is one of the longest borderlines that Syria has. With the Syrian uprising, most Syrians who fled to Turkey came from the southern governorates like Hatay, Kilis, Adana, and Şanlıurfa. Currently, the estimated number of Syrians in Turkey is more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees, almost half of whom are women. Therefore, Turkey has become the world's largest host country for Syrian refugees. With the UNHCR technical support, the Turkish authority is the one that takes the lead in protecting and assisting Syrian refugees on its territories (About UNHCR in Türkiye, n.d.). Syrian refugees in Turkey face many challenges; one of them is the socioeconomic problem, with more than 67% of them are classified to be under the poverty line (Rohwerder, 2018).

Turkey defined Syrians who cross the Turkish borders as "guests." In the initial years of the Syrian crisis, Turkish society positively perceived the presence of Syrians in the country, and

Syrians were able to obtain work permits and get a job in the formal labor market (Koca, 2016). However, Turkey started to impose restrictions on Syrians entering the country, and this marked the end of the open-door policy in 2015 and 2016 (Makovsky, 2019). Syrians who fled to Turkey are diverse in terms of their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Muhanna-Matar, 2022). Due to the high cost of living in Turkey, the socio-economic needs challenge the gendered daily spatial practices Syrian women and men used to have before displacement. In turn, Syrian women in Turkey are also driven by the needs of their families; thus, they go beyond the social boundaries of their familiar networks to search for work opportunities (Muhanna-Matar, 2022).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported in 2017 that 32% of Syrian women refugees are heads of households in Turkey. However, unemployment is high among females in Syrian refugee-hosting areas due to several factors, such as unstable skill sets, language barriers, and the lack of formal work permits (FAO, 2017). Brigitte (2018) reports that many significant challenges face displaced Syrian women in obtaining proper access to the labor market, such as lack of information, lack of childcare, and traditional gender roles. Therefore, displaced Syrian women's access to public spaces is limited compared to men's, especially in southern Turkish areas, as a result of inherited gender roles. Nevertheless, Syrian displaced women who live in Istanbul and have cultural or political networks are more capable of integrating into the Turkish labor market; as a result, they have a better chance. In other words, social and economic class, as well as location, do affect Syrian women's experience of displacement.

In 2021, Açikalin conducted a study on Syrian women's integration into Turkey. The study showed that Syrian refugee women are satisfied with their lives in Turkey. Despite that, the study

highlighted that the level of integration of Syrian women in Turkey varies according to social, educational, and marital factors. Furthermore, Syrian women do not feel that they are treated warmly by the Turkish people, and this represents a challenge. Other challenges, like the language barrier, traditional gender roles, and legal barriers, contributed to the low social inclusion among the displaced Syrian women and the Turkish community. Despite the fact that Syrian displaced women can recognize similarities between the two Muslim countries, i.e., Syria and Turkey, in terms of lifestyle, values, and beliefs, they do not score a high level of social integration. This is caused by the fact that the mutual respect and communication between the migrant, or the displaced community, and the host community are negatively affected by security-related concerns (Açikalin et al., 2021).

Açikalin's report considered that women who are well integrated in the Turkish society are more exposed to the public sphere in Turkey as compared to Syria and that 20% of the displaced Syrian women who have information about the ways to earn money are employed. Moreover, the report emphasizes that Syrian women in Turkey appreciates the educational and livelihood services made available to them by the Turkish government, Non-government Organizations (NGOs), International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs), and Intergovernmental Organizations (IOs). Moreover, some Syrian women who participated in this study indicated that they feel more independent in Turkey than in Syria. This is attributed to the fact that many INGOs, the Turkish government, and non-governmental agencies targeted Syrian displaced women with awareness sessions and services. While men are busy with their long-hour work schedule, women are more active in seeking aid, support, and attending activates provided to them (Açikalin et al., 2021). As

a result, they became more exposed to the work and activities of civil society as compared to their daily-life routine in Syria prior to displacement (Ramadan, 2019).

In 2019, Oula Ramadan conducted research entitled "Syrian Women's Perspectives on Life in Turkey: Rights, Relations and Civil Society." The researcher clarified that accessing civil society was a new experience for Syrian women in displacement because the civil society's space in Syria was extremely limited (Ramadan, 2019). In the initial years of the mass Syrian displacement to Turkey, the focus was on emergency services. However, with the prolonged crisis, the focus shifted to social cohesion between Syrian and Turkish groups. Moreover, International donors encouraged Turkish NGOs to expand their mandate to include Syrian refugees and to allow the initiation of Syrian-led associations (Dağtaş & Can, 2022).

The above-mentioned research by Oula Ramadan assessed the development of Syrian civil society organizations, some of which were women-led organizations. She argued that initially these organizations focused on women's economic empowerment and/or responded to gender-based violence. Later, however, attention shifted to raising the awareness of women to their rights. Inspired by the Turkish social feminists in Hatayi, two Syrian women-led organizations were initiated in Hatayi. Both organizations targeted the needs of Syrian-displaced women and their families, particularly focusing on promoting the public image of Syrian women as active social agents within the Turkish community (Dağtaş & Can, 2022).

Syrian women expanded their access to the public sphere in Turkey through engagement in civil society work to support their community. Fulukah Hurriya and El-Nisa Suria fi Reyhanlı

are two Syrian non-government organizations founded in Turkey and led by Syrian-displaced women with the aim of supporting other Syrian-displaced women in Turkey. Although the management of the two organizations was active against the regime in Syria, their focus was to be active in civil society, empower Syrian women, and create a space to socialize and show solidarity with their nationals in Turkey. Like their Turkish peers, these organizations depended to a certain extent on the INGOs' funding.

The economic crisis worsened Syrian displaced families' lives, increased the poverty rate among them, and pushed men to work for longer hours and women to seek aid from the IOs and INGOs. Dağtaş and Can (2022) explained that the Syrian displaced women expressed their desire to be self-sufficient as their social and material needs portrayed them as a burden on Turkey. Nevertheless, the politics in Turkey allow Syrians to enter the Turkish civil society and initiate non-government organizations to support their nationals. Syrian displaced women also benefit from this chance to participate in new activities and explore new dimensions of displacement.

Jordan:

The majority of Syrian displaced in Jordan live in urban settings, and most of them live in governorates like Irbid, Al Mafrak, and Amman. The UNHCR, through its four offices, is responsible for registering Syrian refugees in Jordan, and it collaborates with Jordan authorities to provide services to them (UNHCR, Jordan, 2023). What's more, over 70% of the Syrian refugees in Jordan live below the Jordanian poverty line (Tobin et al., 2021).

In the same manner, as in Syria, the UNESCWA report (2021) stresses that women's life in Jordan is ruled by the conservative gender roles that keep women and girls from participating equally in the public spheres. Moreover, women face many challenges in being active in public spaces, such as sexual violence. Although the conservative gender roles have kept Syrian women and girls from participating in the public sphere, the need to support their families challenged gender norms. Furthermore, this need led women to illegally find job opportunities like working in the informal sector or illegally moving from the camp (UNESCWA, 2021). Moreover, in research conducted by UN Women in Jordan; many Syrian women expressed their will to find jobs to contribute to their family's income. At the same time, these women reported a high awareness of the difficulty and legal challenges they face in finding a job, making them accept working in the informal sectors (UN Women, 2018).

In Jordan, many Syrian women work for the first time in their lives; moreover, many contribute to the family's income while other women become the head of the household. As such, Syrian women have witnessed a major gender performance shift by accessing the labor market exactly as Syrian males, who mainly dominated this performance before the exile (Culcasi, 2019). In the NGO sector in camps, Syrian women meet to socialize and get training on different handcrafts; then, they sell their products in the camp's quarterly bazaar. In her paper, Culcasi (2019) states that Syrian women should be recognized as complex individuals who, despite the challenges they experience, show incredible resilience. Also, the writer asserts that despite being deprived of many political and human rights and entangled in a patriarchal structure, Syrian women in Jordan are not merely victims. Women outside the household usually work as nurses, cooks, trauma counselors, and hair stylists (Culcasi, 2019).

In 2020, Tobin wrote an article that discussed how displacement becomes “emplacement” in the case of Syrian refugee women in Jordan. Jordan supports a more open religious and social life for its residents than Syria, which encouraged Syrian displaced women to explore this dimension and use it as a coping mechanism tool to integrate with the Jordanian community. Integrating within the host community gives Syrian women the opportunity to establish their own activities outside their private sphere in displacement. They are emplacing themselves and moving publicly in the Jordanian material and social-religious landscape. Unlike Jordan, the Syrian government puts regulations to maintain a secular regime and bans religious activities, so Syrians’ freedom to explore their religious identity on the social level was limited (Tobin, 2020).

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission of West Asia (ESCWA) stated that women in Jordan with higher education usually get more chances to find a job and be financially independent. Therefore, many Syrian refugee women expressed their willingness to continue their higher education in Jordan or Syria if they get the chance. However, the same paper showed that the Jordanian labor market is marked by inequality between men and women, in addition to the social norms that restrict most Jordanian women’s ambition to prioritize having jobs over creating a family. Similarly, traditions and social norms are obstacles that reduce the accessibility of Syrian refugee women to the labor market. Despite the fact that issuing the Jordanian Compact in 2016, which aims at increasing the work permits for Syrian refugees in Jordan, only 7000 females out of 153,000 applicants got work permissions.

Lebanon:

The discussion here tackles Lebanon, a small country with a population barely exceeding 5 million (*World Bank Open Data*, n.d.), which has received more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict (OCHA, 2015). Like Jordan, Lebanon did not ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. All Syrian refugees are self-settled in Lebanon as the country refused to build camps for Syrian refugees to protect its sectarian fabric. Therefore, the burden of registering, protecting, and assisting refugees was primarily run by the UNHCR in Lebanon (Kagan, 2011). Syrians were living in over 1,750 locations across Lebanon (UNHCR, 2015); however, in early 2015, the Lebanese government gave instructions to stop any new registration of Syrian refugees. As such, the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon decreased from almost 1.5 by the end of 2015 to over 879,000 by the end of 2020 (UNHCR, 2020). Even though Gissi (2019) points out that "Syrian migrant" is perceived as a lower threat to the Lebanese sectarian fabric than "Syrian refugee," they both face the threat of repatriation at any time (Human Right Watch, 2018). The Lebanese law allows only Syrians who renewed their residency through sponsorship by Lebanese nationals and registered refugees with the UNHCR to stay legally in Lebanon. This result in the exclusion of almost 500,000 Syrians who are not registered with the UNHCR (Janmyr, 2018).

In 2020, the Operational Update report conducted by the UNHCR estimated that nearly 90% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon live below the extreme poverty line (Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, 2023). Therefore, the majority of Syrian refugees depend on humanitarian aid, as Elmasri, *et al.* (2013) explained how Syrian refugee women are either totally or partially

responsible for securing those aid for their families. This pushes Syrian refugee women to be more exposed to reaching out to INGOs and IOs in order to seek assistance, cope with the critical economic reality, and get their new role as the "family aid broker." As such, this strengthened them despite the mental and physical pressure it came with. The Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon conducted in 2022 declared that although more than 45% of households were women, the percentage of Syrian working women is 9% compared to 59% on the side of men. Gissi (2019) illustrates that many reasons hindered Syrian refugee women in Lebanon from getting employed. Such reasons relate to injustice, severe exploitation, and harassment.

In Lebanon, women's exposure to the public sphere increased by reaching out to get INGOs and IOs assistance; however, not all these women feel comfortable being exposed to the INGOs or being in public spaces because of the discrimination and harassment they experience. The presence of Syrian civil society organizations in Lebanon encouraged Syrian refugees and, in particular, women to open up and interact with these organizations. In Lebanon, several Syrian-led organizations worked not only on distributing food, clothes, and financial assistance but also arranged various activities to generate trust and cooperation among the different groups in the Syrian community in displacement. These organizations give special treatment to women by providing them with safe spaces and training opportunities to hone skills and generate income in order to restore their sense of dignity (Welander, 2016).

Lebanon's policy toward displaced Syrians restricted their mobility and weakened their integration opportunities within the Lebanese community. The Lebanese government labeled Syrian refugees as "temporarily displaced individuals" (Janmyr, 2017). The security concern and

the continuous threat of repatriation is a nightmare for Syrians in Lebanon, especially for women, as it minimizes their interaction with the host community and their opportunities to find jobs. Hence, the availability of Syrian-led organizations in Lebanon gave Syrian-displaced women a safe space to socialize within their own community and learn new skills. Syrian women in Lebanon were more open to dealing with Syrian-led organizations than with international organizations. Al Munajed (2020) summed up the situation of Syrian women in Lebanon when she stated that discriminatory policies greatly hindered the participation of Syrian women in social life in Lebanon. Besides, she recognized that Syrian females in Lebanon who managed to get leadership positions often come from wealthy urban backgrounds and hold highly educated degrees. Thus, educational and socio-economic backgrounds do affect women's experience in Lebanon.

Egypt:

Even though Egypt does not border Syria, Syrians have a historical connection with Egypt; therefore, after 2011, Egypt received many asylum seekers who ran away from the violence and insecurity in Syria to reside in Egyptian cities and towns. Moreover, many have family members living in Egypt so they decided to join their families. It is argued that the majority of Syrians who fled to Egypt in the beginning of the conflict in 2011 belonged to the affluent class. However, with the continuation and escalation of the conflict, Syrians from different social classes started to arrive in Egypt (Ayoub & Khallaf, 2014). According to UNHCR statistics, the number of Syrian asylum seekers in Egypt reached 141,303 in 2022.

The Egyptian authority announced an open-door policy for accepting Syrians in Egypt and giving them access to public facilities from 2011 until 2013. However, after 2013, this policy changed, and visa restrictions were imposed on Syrians due to the change in regime, the political unrest, and the alleged Syrian refugee identification with the Muslim Brotherhood (Suerbaum, 2018).

Most Syrian refugees in Egypt face difficulties in meeting their basic needs, and they do not have access to the formal sector because they are treated as foreigners and must secure a work permit. To protect the local labor market, Egypt allows a very limited number of work permits to foreigners who need to prove that they have skills different from the local population. As a result, Syrians in Egypt seek job opportunities in the informal market. (Hassan, 2021).

Relevant to this thesis are two important studies that highlight the living conditions of Syrians in Egypt, both are published by the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) at the American University in Cairo. The first is the report entitled "Syrians in Egypt: Challenges of a politically changing environment." It is an important reference for this thesis as it explains the living conditions of Syrians in Egypt, comparing their situation before and after the change in the Egyptian regime in 2013. The second is the report "Refugee Entitlement in Egypt," which assessed the different entitlements given to refugees in Egypt, including Syrians, and how the provision of these entitlements differs according to nationality. As such, these two studies provide a good foundation to understand the situation of Syrians in Egypt, the focus of this thesis. Notwithstanding the importance of the two reports, both reports do not have a gender focus; they rather tackled the situation of Syrians in general.

Studies that tackled the situation of Syrian women in particular are very few. An example is a chapter by Suerbaum titled “Claiming Successful Middle-Class Masculinity Through Work.” In this chapter, Suerbaum highlighted that in the context of forced displacement and in the light of the drained economic situation in Egypt, men face a crisis when they can no longer provide adequate income for their families. However, Syrian men reluctantly acknowledge that Syrian women are active in the Egyptian labor market and that they started to change their lifestyles accordingly. Suerbaum indicated that in the Syrian tradition, men were the breadwinners of their families, and it was shameful to let women be responsible for providing money for the house. Syrian men downplay women’s participation in the Egyptian labor market because the patriarchal system idealized gender relations in which men were in the provider position, and women were in the “weak” position (Suerbaum, 2020). In another article by Suerbaum in 2018 titled “Defining the Other to Masculinize Oneself: Syrian Men’s Negotiations of Masculinity during Displacement in Egypt,” she illustrated that part of Syrian men’s construction of masculinity is the Syrian women's position in the community. Therefore, many men participating in the interviews ignored the fact that women are visible in the public sphere in Egypt and that they have become active in income generating for their families (Suerbaum, 2018). Suerbaum’s studies, as such, allow us to see the shift in gender roles from the Syrian men’s lens. Syrian men see this shift in gender roles in displacement as a temporary situation, a perspective that may challenge women’s ability to maintain their new position in the public sphere if they return to Syria or if their economic situation gets better.

Two theses are relevant to this research as they focused on Syrian women. The first is by Bahgat (2015), which researched the survival mechanisms of Syrian households. She interviewed 18 Syrian heads of households and found that half of them were women; however, most of these women were unemployed, and they depended on the INGOs and IOs support. Bahgat mentioned that Syrian women in the 6th October city who belonged to the low-income group did not have sufficient interaction and integration with their social surroundings. They were afraid of being harassed, so they preferred to stay at home. Her study indicated that the majority of the female interviewees lacked access to work while the majority of men were educated and had access to the labor market.

Bahgat added that those women depended only on aid from IOs, INGOs, and NGOs to get their basic needs. Bahgat concluded that such findings indicated the vulnerability of women in poor areas in the context of forced displacement. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that all the women participants in Bahgat's research belong to the lower-income class, and she indicated that this is a limitation of her study. The second thesis is by Mahmoud (2017) who conducted fifteen interviews at ElRehab City to measure Syrians' level of integration and access to the labor market in Egypt. She interviewed 10 men; four belonged to the upper class, whereas the remaining six belonged to the middle class, and five women, two of whom were elderly housewives, and the remaining three were involved in paid work. When asking these women about the issues that might hinder their integration and access to the labor market or entrepreneurship in Egyptian society, most of them mentioned concerns about the high level of harassment, especially outside ElRehab city. These concerns decrease Syrian women's interaction with the Egyptian community (Mahmoud, 2017).

An important reference for this thesis is the chapter "Gender and Exile: Syrian Refugee Women in Cairo" by Ayoub (2017). The source is important because it focuses on women, in particular, arguing that the refugee experience is not unified and differs according to socioeconomic class, education, age, and other variables. Ayoub (2017) interviewed 15 Syrian women from different socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Most of them, however, come from conservative backgrounds, and they mentioned that the higher living expenses in Cairo pushed them to look for work outside their homes in order to earn money and support their families. Five Syrian women among the interviewees were engaged in paid work, i.e., the majority were teachers, six were involved in economic activities, and four were not engaged in any available income-generating activity.

Those involved in economic activities, like cooking and handmade crafts, sold their products through NGOs or bazaars (Ayoub, 2017). The chapter argued that only those who belonged to middle-income classes were able to find income-generating activities. In contrast, those who belonged to the low-income class remained marginalized and excluded. Ayoub (2017) stated that women who work from home cannot find new opportunities because of the masculine dominance in the job market. The chapter concluded that socioeconomic situation and education shape women's experience of displacement. In fact, women from the middle class chose to go to work as they were inspired by Egyptian women who are highly engaged in paid work and daily jobs despite the high level of harassment. However, most of the interviewed women were teachers at Syrian Educational Centers, which indicated that they might feel safer teaching at Syrian centers.

In 2018, Stanevicius conducted a thesis in which she interviewed five Syrian educational centers in Cairo. They mainly depended on Syrian women to educate their children. With a generation of Syrian children who do not have a first-hand attachment to Syria, the educational centers were established in Cairo by Syrians to provide children with education and, at the same time, offer cultural protection. Moreover, Syrians use these centers to preserve Syrian culture and the way of life. Syrian women represent the majority of the teachers in the Syrian educational centers in Cairo because men do not like to teach because the pay is low. Syrian women teachers play a two-folded role within the education system in Cairo. Firstly, they become part of the cultural transformation as they are working, and that was not common back in Syria. Secondly, working as teachers, they are helping in preserving Syrian culture. Therefore, Syrian teacher women in Cairo are acting as agents of social change by working and taking part in non-traditional gender roles. Furthermore, Stanevicius (2018) illustrated how Syrian women who participated in her research were proud of their achievements as Syrians and as women in displacement.

A third thesis is by Rosenberg (2016) who studied Syrian-led organizations and argued that these organizations managed to operate successfully in Cairo and provide relief, social services, and new social networks to the displaced Syrian community. All these organizations offered their offices to be places where Syrians could meet, exchange information, build a network, and form personal relationships. With the deterioration of support and aid coming from the international organization and the UNHCR in Egypt, several Syrian organizations saw the importance of offering services that help community members to find jobs or generate income. Some of their services targeted women with support, legal sessions, vocational training, and invitations to sell their products in bazaars.

According to Rosenberg (2016), “Souriat” is a successful example of Syrian women-led organizations that was established in 2012 and aimed to support and provide activities and services for Syrian women. This organization was not the only organization that recruited women among the other Syrian organizations but was the pioneer in having women on the executive board. Women found a place for them within the new Syrian-led organizations that offered a safe haven for Syrian-displaced women to socialize and experience the public sphere in Cairo (Rosenberg, 2016).

Another relevant study to this thesis is a journal by Mansour (2018), who conducted a study to identify the information-seeking behaviors of Syrians displaced in Egypt. The study is relevant because it highlights the level of activism within the Syrian community. Mansour’s study included 43% women and 57% men and asserted that Syrians in Egypt actively use social media to communicate with each other and try to keep updated with the latest information.

To summarize, numerous studies are carried out on the situation of Syrian women in the major refugee hosting countries. These studies highlight that the exposure of Syrian women to the public sphere increased with displacement. The main reason attributed to that is the economic needs that pushed women to take many of the men’s responsibilities either because many became the sole breadwinner or because of the increased need of men to work longer hours. Moreover, the proliferation of INGOs and NGOs providing services to Syrians offered a space for women and increased their access to the public sphere. The above review of the literature highlights that the degree of women’s involvement in the public sphere is affected by the host country’ social, political and economic context and the extent by which this context is different or similar from Syria.

It is also affected by the individual characteristic of women in terms of social class and education. The different studies in the different countries show that educated Syrian women who belong to the middle class are more able to penetrate the public sphere in displacement. This thesis aims to contribute to this literature by focusing on the case of Egypt. The case of Egypt is particularly interesting because as the above review of the literature indicates that not many studies in Egypt tackled the subject of this thesis. Most of the studies carried out in Egypt did not focus on women and those that did examined other issues other than the engagement in the public sphere. As such, this thesis aims to fill a gap in the literature by studying the case of Egypt.

2. Methodology

The thesis focuses on Syrian women who were displaced because of the 2011 conflict and settled in Egypt. As mentioned earlier, UNHCR's registration does not accurately account for the number of displacements, as many Syrians are not registered with UNHCR. The reasons for not registering with UNHCR are numerous and include the fear and stigma associated with the word 'refugee' as well as the misconception of UNHCR's mandate as a service provider. As such, those not in need of services might refrain from registering with UNHCR (Ayoub & Khallef, 2014). The target group for this thesis is Syrian women, regardless of their registration status with UNHCR. A qualitative research design is the most appropriate approach for this study because the study aims to explore Syrian women's insights deeply. Generally, the qualitative method effectively identifies intangible factors like gender roles, socioeconomic status, and social norms (Mack et al., 2005).

In the context of social study, the qualitative research method provides a detailed textual description of the people's experiences. This method is ideal for my research as it is more attentive to the social role and cultural context that play in all aspects of the research enterprise (Marvasti, 2004). The study depended on conducting interviews and focus group discussions with a selected sample of participants. The sample was chosen purposefully to include women who are active and engaged with the Syrian community in Egypt. Purposive sampling is accepted and widely used in qualitative research because such a sample achieves the targets of qualitative research, not to ensure representativeness but rather to answer the conceptual question of the research (Gubrium, 2012). The conceptual question of this thesis is how displacement affects women's engagement in the public sphere. As such, the research purposely chose women who are engaged in community activities in Egypt and asked them if this was the case in Syria and, if not, what promoted their engagement in Egypt.

The research process is molded by the social context and values that underline its assumption. In the Syrian social context, men's and women's lives significantly shaped gender relations. This research looked into a possible social change and gender role shift among Syrian women in displacement, so men are considered both part and witness of these changes. Therefore, conducting interviews with both men and women became a needed social practice to document the influence of gender throughout the empirical work (Herod, 1993).

To reach out for the sample, the researcher contacted Syrian-led Organizations that provide services for Syrians in Egypt. Thirteen interviews were carried out with Syrian women in February and March 2023. After completing the interviews, I realized that most of them are highly educated

(have university degrees) and mainly located in the 6th of October and Nasr City. As such, the initial result indicated the need to do further fieldwork to represent the Syrian community's variety in Greater Cairo. So, in June 2023, I did two FGDs to include different categories of women and cover a wider geographical area in Greater Cairo. Two FGDs were carried out with twenty-one women from different backgrounds in Haram and Obour. In addition, seven interviews were carried out with men, mainly in the 6th of October and Obour, to understand their opinion regarding the research topic. The researcher explained the purpose of this study to all the participants in both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion (FGD); after that, participants signed an Arabic consent form for this study. Both interviews and FGD were conducted in Arabic, then the transcripts were written in English. Participants were given fake names in the findings sections to protect their identities. The data analysis was done directly after finalizing the desk research for Chapter three in July.

The fieldwork of this thesis covered Syrians who lived in four neighborhoods: 6th of October, Obour, Nasr City, Haram, and Faysal. 25 of them came from the rural areas of different Syrian cities like Damascus, Aleppo, and Daraa. Two-thirds of the participants were between the ages of 20 and 50, and the last third was divided between the age above 50 and under 20. There were variations in the women's level of education, i.e., four were illiterate, eight women finished elementary school while nine finished their secondary school, 12 had their Bachelor's Degrees, and two with Master's degrees. 30 out of 34 ladies are registered with UNHCR as asylum seekers; however, only twelve of them get assistance from UNHCR. UNHCR's assistance is only given to the most needy and vulnerable cases.

In-depth Interviews

The study aimed to explore the experience of Syrian-displaced women in terms of their engagement in the public sphere in Egypt. In addition, it examined how such engagement impact gender norms and women's awareness. One of the research tools used in this research is in-depth interviews. This tool helps us see the world from the respondent's point of view. Moreover, in-depth interviews should mutually benefit both the subject and the researcher; they also help gain knowledge by uncovering hidden feelings during the interview process (Marvasti, 2004). In my research, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 ladies and seven Syrian men and followed the principle of 'saturation.' In qualitative research, saturation happens when the researcher notices that a certain theme is coming out repeatedly or when no new ideas, opinions, or themes emerge throughout the interviews with the targeted sample (Hennink et al., 2017).

To organize the in-depth interviews, I took the following steps. First, I chose the sample according to specific criteria related to this research's objectives: Syrian women who came to Egypt after 2011 and are active in the Syrian community in Egypt. The sample included women whose ages ranged between 20 to 55 (working-age women). These women were selected from different educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. As the topic is focused on understanding the level of civic engagement, participants must have work experience in any field in the host countries. Also, I tried to have a couple of interviews with women who are well-known in the Syrian community for their activism in Syria. These interviews enabled me to understand the Syrian context and the opportunities available for women in Syria before displacement.

Secondly, I tried to find a suitable place for the Syrian women participants to conduct the interview. Women's interviews were conducted in places chosen by the interviews. These places were mainly at either the Syrian-led Organizations, or at a café shop near the interviewee's home. Therefore, by the end of March 2023, thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted in two main areas: 6th of October and Nasr City. While conducting some of the interviews, and with the interviewee's consent, there were usually some other Syrian women who listened to the discussion in the interview. In most cases, the interviews ended up with those in the room grabbing chairs to sit next to us and trying to add or assert some of the information they heard from the interviewees. It seems that this topic is something that women want to hear about and may discuss it further if they have the chance. The observation and the field notes give the researcher a multi-level textualization set off by experience (Wolfinger, 2002).

Regarding the interviews with men, seven interviews were conducted in June 2023. Almost two-thirds of the male participants were between the ages of 20 and 50 and came from different Syrian governorates, like Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Daraa. The majority came from cities and lived in Egyptian neighborhoods, like the 6th of October and Obour City. Although the numbers of male and female participants in this study are not equal, the researcher noticed that the percentage of men with higher education in the group is more as compared to women. Moreover, all of them got have a secondary level school education. Thus, none of them is illiterate, while the FGD with women included four illiterate women. Regarding their legal status, they are all registered with the UNHCR, and two of them only have residency on their passports. Five out of seven are married and have children, while the rest are single but responsible for their families.

Six out of seven men work in Egypt in the informal sector, and they provide the main source of income for their families.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Two focus group discussions were conducted in Haram and Obour. The principal advantage of focus group discussions is getting a large amount of information quickly and allowing me to access a broad range of views on my topic. This tool is typical for electing opinions about group norms and discovering the variation within a population (Mack et al. 2005). This thesis conducted two focus group discussions in two different locations in Greater Cairo. The Obour group had 12 women participants, and the Haram group had nine women participants. The two FGDs were conducted in one of the Syrian-led organizations (SLO). The Syrian women who volunteered in this SLO supported the researcher in reaching out to the sample by sending invitations via WhatsApp to women who fit the research criteria.

The decision to do the FGDs was made to ensure that the research covered women from different educational and social backgrounds. As discussed earlier, the Syrian women who were targeted to participate in the FGDs came from lower educational and social backgrounds compared to those who participated in the in-depth interviews. FGDs were conducted in Syrian-led organizations (SLO). On the one hand, the Obour group had 12 Syrian ladies; seven had reached elementary school, two secondaries, and only one had a BA. They are mainly depended on their husbands to earn a living. The common theme among all the participants was abiding strictly by their conservative traditions. A sign that indicates that this group maintains the Syrian traditions in rural areas is the fact that they wear dark clothes (coats and hair covers).

On the other hand, the Haram group and the interview group have a higher percentage of educated women and seem more integrated with the Egyptian context. This group had more women involved in community work than the Obour group. In addition, it had two participants who came recently from Syria, enriching the discussion in terms of observing the changes happening to Syrian women in displacement.

To summarize, I depended on two qualitative research methods: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. First, I interviewed women; then, I used the initial results to narrow down the criteria for the focus group discussions. After that, I conducted the interviews with men, completed the desk research, and analyzed the fieldwork findings.

3. Limitations

Since this study adopts a qualitative research methodology, it is not representative. Another limitation has to do with the fact that I am a Syrian lady researching a topic about Syrian women, which is a double-edged tool. On the one hand, I faced some resistance from the male participants in the in-depth interviews to get accurate information about the change in women's roles they observed and on the other hand, being Syrian gave me an easier access to the Syrian community in Cairo. Another difficulty encountered is that most participants did not like the word 'displacement' or 'نزوح' in Arabic, so I started the interviews with unexpected negative impressions, especially with the participants in the FGDs. Participants had a hard feeling regarding the term 'displacement,' and it seemed from the participants' reactions that its meaning in Arabic has a stigmatized hint. It reminds them of the conflict and the vulnerability that they try to overcome.

After ten years of displacement, many participants asked me to change the word 'displacement' to a word like 'exile.' I mitigate this limitation by replacing the word 'displacement' with 'forced migration' or 'هجرة قسرية' in Arabic.

4. Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality' recognizes that individuals have multiple identities and that these identities cannot be viewed in isolation. Neither women nor men can be studied or perceived as one category. Davis (2008) stated that in women's studies, diversity and differences among women are now widely acknowledged. Accordingly, this thesis will use intersectionality as a framework to conduct the field work and analyze the findings. Intersectionality is used as a theoretical framework that incorporates multiple social categories like socioeconomic status, gender, race, etc. Kimberly Crenshaw first used intersectionality in 1989 to address the issue of how feminist failed to adequately acknowledge the experiences and struggles of women of color. According to Crenshaw, the intersectionality approach recognizes the different ways in which different forms of oppression (not only gender) interact and intersect to lead to the creation of a unique experience of marginalization. Along the same lines, Collins (2000), elaborated in her book, "Black feminist thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment," that Crenshaw contributed to establishing a significant theoretical framework for feminist studies. She seconded Crenshaw's analysis of the uniqueness of the situation of women of color، and how it had been marginalized in the community.

Collins (2000) described intersectionality as a “matrix of dominations” where multiple systems of power and privilege intersect based on gender, race, and class and initiate multifaceted experiences for women to produce something unique and different from any form of discrimination standing alone. Therefore, it is almost impossible to understand women’s experiences through a solo lens as their experiences depend on connecting multiple dimensions and disciplines like psychology, history, sociology, and more.

Bastia (2014) noted that even though women of color were seen as the main subject for the earlier intersectionality definitions, migrant women are fast becoming the new “quintessential intersectional subjects,” given the fact that migrants cross multiple boundaries, viz., gender, racial and ethical. Collins (2000) differentiated between two levels of intersectionality, micro and macro levels. According to Collins (2000), social inequality can be analyzed through the intersectionality lens by dividing this topic into micro and macro levels. Through the ‘micro’ level, intersectionality is used to understand how each individual and group explores both the “intersectional” forms of daily oppression and their positions in society. In contrast, the ‘macro’ level represent the bigger “interlocking” oppression and privilege systems. The micro “intersectional” and the macro “interlocking” are complementary for Collins. For example, on the micro level, Fileborn and Gray (2017) used the intersectional framework to analyze women who experienced stresst harassment. They demonstrated how women experience harassment in multiple ways based on their unique intersectional identities like race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Then, they moved to the macro level to discuss how different forms of oppression interact to shape the individual experience of stress harassment.

Another example is a report entitled “Intersectionality: A Tool for Gender and Economic Justice,” which explained economic inequality from the macro and micro intersectional levels. On the macro level, it revealed how the system of power and privilege could intersect to shape different patterns of economic inequality through the policies and laws of the new-liberal globalization world. On the micro level, it applied the intersectional lens to study and analyze how gender intersects with other women’s identities like race, class, culture, language, and more to create a unique experience of oppression and privilege.

For instance, female domestic workers will dwell in the harassment dilemma if the intersection between micro factors, e.g., female, poor, foreign citizen, etc.; and macro factors, e.g., empowerment policies, laws for foreigners, shelters for abused women, etc., has not taken place to advocate for social and economic justice (Symington, 2004). To conclude, the previously mentioned examples showed how intersectionality might be used to comprehend social injustice at both the micro and macro levels. Most importantly, it identified how intricate and intertwin types of oppression can influence the variety of people’s experiences. Intersectionality, as a framework, helps to study and comprehend the multiple oppressions and privileges that people may experience depending on their varied identities.

Although intersectionality was first initiated to analyze women of color's experience in the Western community, scholars (Basti, 2014; Davis, 2008; Dhamoon, 2011; Nash, 2008) build on this theory, discuss it, and expand its potential targeted group and context. Smooth (2013) stated that Intersectionality has become an important analytical framework perfectly designed to understand how different social identities of women segregated by race, gender, and class are

interconnected to produce experiences of both privilege and marginalization. Consequently, these different social identities that women experience at the micro level intersect to define the hierarchical social system at the macro level in the non-western context. The general principle of intersectionality emphasizes the importance of tackling women's studies from multiple lenses. Furthermore, it avoids dealing with women as one homogenous category owing to the fact that their experience does differ according to micro and macro factors.

In this thesis, Syrian displaced women's experience will be measured based on the intersectionality framework. It will take into account that Syrian displaced women in Cairo came from different educational, social, and economic backgrounds. These different backgrounds intersect with each other to result in various experiences Syrian women have in displacement. These micro-level facts are influenced as well by other macro factors in the host country, like the legal, social, and economic conditions. Consequently, this study will aim to examine how the interrelations among all the macro factors affected the challenges and opportunities of the Syrian displaced women.

III. Chapter Three: Arab Women and the Public Sphere

This thesis is concerned with displacement and women's increased participation in the public sphere. The previous chapter reviewed the literature on women in displacement, focusing particularly on Syrian women displaced in Arab countries since 2011. Since the thesis focuses on Syrian women who moved to Egypt after 2011, the aim of this chapter is to explain the level of Arab women's engagement with the public sphere, highlighting the difference between the Egyptian and the Syrian context. The first section of the chapter briefly explains the situation of Arab women in general in terms of access to education, employment, and political participation. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the women's movements in Syria and Egypt as of the twentieth century.

1. Arab Women and the Public Sphere:

Although history tells us that Arab women contributed to public life (Guthrie, 2013), in the modern era, many women in Arab countries are still dominated by the patriarchal order where cultural norms restrict women's participation in public spaces (Chamlou et al., 2011; Khalaf et al., 2015; Meriwether, 2018; Moghadam, 2004; Shamlawi and Saqfalhait, 2016). Despite the increased enrollment of Arab women in the education system, patriarchal norms limit their access to the labor market. Fargues (2002), however, argues that this situation slightly changed with the beginning of the new millennium in medium and low-income Arab countries due to the deteriorated economic conditions that pushed women to the labor market. Fargues (2002) highlights that education and employment raised the marriage age for women and resulted as well in decreasing women's fertility.

However, he does not consider such development as a sign of women's "empowerment." He stipulates that women's partial empowerment and participation in the household income are not based on a shift in understanding women's role but rather due to the neoliberal economic policies that increased the level of poverty and thus the inability of men to cover all the household needs. Despite the slight increase in women's participation in the labor market with the new millennium, participation is still considered low. According to the latest statistics, Arab countries have the lowest Female labor rate, with an average of 18.4 compared to the global average of 48 percent. It is worth mentioning that the same reference mentioned that the male labor rate is 77 percent, which is above the global average of 75 (ILO, 2023).

With regard to high-income Arab Gulf countries, Almansour and Kempner (2016) showcase the example of highly educated women in one of the Saudi Universities: Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University (PNU). The University was founded in 1970, and is one of the largest women's universities in the world. It contributes to expanding women's participation in the Kingdom's development process. Despite that, female professors at the university encounter many difficulties, including family obligations and cultural obstacles that limit their mobility. Almansour and Kempner (2016) argue that many of the professors who participated in their research mentioned that there are many administrative and social factors that limit their ability to choose their research topics freely. In the case of the UAE, Emirati women seem to have more space for freedom and mobility compared to the Saudi example.

This emerges from the fact that the UAE intentionally seeks to achieve regional prominence by promoting its unique standards of gender equality. Despite the economic development that the small country has achieved since 1970, Carvalho (2019) asserts that the UAE's official proclamations about gender equality in the state do not meet international standards. Carvalho argues that the UAE is shedding light on a small group of women who engage in unconventional decision-making positions rather than paying attention to the overall women population.

With regard to political participation, the level of Arab women's political participation is the lowest in the world. Dahlerup (2009) points out that many Arab countries like Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt attempted to reserve quotas for women in the parliaments; however, these efforts did not include women in political life. Dahlerup declares that on one hand, women in these countries do not get real chances to reserve seats on the political parties list and on the other hand, they usually do not get elected even by women. UNDP (2002) mentions that ignoring women, who represent more than half of the population of the Arab world, is a waste of human resources. This raises a question related to the level of women's activism in civil society and how women preserve their role in the community.

In her research, Zuhur (2003) defines women's empowerment in the public sphere as a condition that allows women to obtain educational, legal, and political rights equal to their male peers as well as enabling them to work and be aware of their rights. Zuhur states that Arab citizens generally lack power and proper rights when they have limited income. Although women suffer from this reality more than men, literature proves that Arab women have managed to take a step forward towards empowerment and to be more present in the public sphere.

Zuhur adds that the specialty of the context in the Arab world is that women's empowerment topic entangled with the struggle between the civil society and the state, on the one hand, and with the ongoing debates over the appropriate role to adopt in the Arab world, Western or Islamic feminist ideology, on the other hand.

Nevertheless, the concept of women's empowerment is not limited to governmental attitudes and regulations. It should go beyond them to include women in civil society in order to increase their knowledge of the history of women's movements both in their country and in the region. In addition, women need to navigate the social and psychological effects of the patriarchal system that limited women to family roles so that they are given access to creative solutions to impose the change they want (Zuhur, 2003). Participation in civil society is at the heart of activism toward the change that Arab women need.

In her article "Women and Activism in the Arab World," Helou (2005) explains that activism is an action intentionally carried out to serve other people or to raise awareness of a topic for the public to benefit from. Therefore, exercising one's rights cannot be fully considered a form of activism. For example, the attempts of women who report violence to the police or INGOs or cast their voices in national elections are not considered a form of activism. Activism should be directed to the community for the purpose of bettering the life of the whole community (Helou, 2005).

2. The Syrian Women's Movement

The Syrian women's movement in the twentieth century cannot be explained in isolation from the political context of Syria. The first part of this section explains the development of the women's movement since independence and until the rule of the Ba'ath party, paying particular attention to the impact of such rule on the development of civil society. The second section explains the development of the women's movement since the rule of the Ba'ath party with a focus on the Ba'ath state's perception of women in society. The third and final section explains the impact of the 2011 uprising on the Syrian women's movement.

From independence to the Ba'ath regime

In 1946, Syrians gained their independence from France; however, the country has never enjoyed stable civil rule since then. Military domination has always been the shadow of the Syrian government. Syria witnessed sixteen army coups between 1945 and 1963, which ended in having the Arab Socialist Ba'ath party, which overthrew the parliament and handed the country's institutions to its fellows, and that was the end of the 'real' parliamentary rule in Syria (Bellafronto, 2005).

Syrian women have been part of the people's movements for independence (Bellafronto, 2005). For example, Nazik al-Abid (1887–1959) is one of the pioneer Syrian feminists who was involved in the fight against French occupation, she founded the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (Aubin-Boltanski & Khalbous, 2022), and she called for full citizenship rights including the right to vote (Weber 2008). However, the first Syrian constitution in 1930 did not include any provision for women's suffrage. Syria joined the International Women Suffrage Alliance in 1929 and

attended its 11th Conference in Berlin in the same year. At this conference, the idea to organize the women of the Middle East was established. As such, in the following year, the conference was held in Damascus. The Damascus conference was organized by the General Union of Syrian Women that Nour Hamada, a female Druze leader, headed. Nonetheless, the Damascus Congress did not lead to the desired reforms in the Arab world (Weber 2008). Yet, attempts to gain the right to vote continued until Syrian women obtained the right to vote in 1949 and then the right to stand for elections in 1953 (Moore & Talarico, 2015).

The 1950s Constitution granted Syrian women the right to vote and participate in politics. Despite its suspension several times, this constitution was marked as the most liberated constitution in Syrian history (Ziadeh, 2017). The 1950 Constitution allowed the formation of civil society organizations in Syria, and women were allowed to participate in these organizations. Nevertheless, the work of civil society declined in the late 1950s with the union with Egypt and the decision of Gamel Abel Nasser, the Egyptian leader, to dissolve all the political parties in Syria. Political parties were completely banned from Syria in 1980 (Al Shiekh, 2021).

Bellafronto (2005) highlighted that Sunni Muslims, who represented 72% of the Syrian population, dominated the government before the Al Ba'ath Coupe in 1963. With the Al Ba'ath Coupe and the rise of Hafez Al-Assad to power in 1970, Alwaites, who represented 12% of the Syrian population, dominated the Ba'ath party, the executive branch of the government until today (Khatib, 2016). The government and its security agencies maintained a state of emergency in the country to limit all civil society activities.

Hinnebusch (1993) explains that the viable civil society that existed prior to the Ba'ath state is limited after the Ba'ath regime to either traditional associations and charities or professional syndicates, unions, and business associations that all operate under the close monitoring of the regime. And despite slightly opening the door for the private sector in the 1990s, the space was not expanded to civil society.

With the death of Hafez al-Assad on June 10, 2000, a movement known as "The Damascus Spring", initiated by a number of noted Damascene intellectuals, was sparked by his death and the passing of the presidency to his son Bashar al-Assad. At the very beginning of his rule, Bashar al-Assad was slightly tolerant of the Damascus Spring Declaration's activists. Bellafronto (2005) demonstrates that the group was given the space to meet and express their views, yet they were not allowed to gather publicly for demonstrations. However, in 2001, one year after his presidency, the movement was attacked by the security and many Damascus Spring activists were arrested (Eisenlohr, 2011).

The Ba'ath regime and the perception of women

According to Aldoughali (2019), the 1973 Constitution of Syria represented the Ba'ath ideology. He argues that it perpetuates militarism and masculine protection and maintains the subordinate status that frames women's role in the country. Many articles of this constitution reinforced the male-assigned role in the state to be the protector of female rights and systematically excluded and discriminated against women. For example, Article 11 restricted the right to defend the territory of the homeland only to men and Article 43 allowed Syrian males only to pass citizenship to their children. Furthermore, article 508 allowed the rapist to escape punishment if he married his victim. Legalizing, as such, violence against women under the logic of patriarchal protection.

Aldoughali (2019) argued that, even when the state issues new laws to improve women's situations at points, it deeply took this action to enhance the country's economic situation, so the motive was not essentially women's empowerment. For instance, to decrease the growth of the population in 2008, the government issued a new policy, putting control on women's fertility with the alleged goal of enhancing women's educational progress and promoting their contribution to decision-making. This policy claimed that targeting girls with more extended compulsory education would give them a chance to get more education and decrease their fertility years. However, this policy basically aimed to decrease the number of the population, so this law patently shows masculine dominance and how the state controls women's right to bear children and places men as protectors of women's decisions (Aldoughali, 2019).

Bellafronto (2005) stresses that despite the male-biased constitution, the Syrian government encouraged women's education and allowed women's participation in the workforce and in politics. The encouragement of women's education resulted in an increase in literacy rate among women from 48% in 1990 to 74% in 2002. Participation in the labor market is low as statistics indicated that Syrian women's access to the workforce was 29% in 2002 (Bellafronto, 2005). Kamla (2014) argues that the problem is not only the low participation of women in the workforce but also their subordinate roles. For example, certain occupations, usually those that are highly paid, are reserved for men. An example is accounting which is largely considered a masculine job, and only highly qualified women can access it. Moreover, women who access this field are discriminated against in the workplace based on their gender, as they are judged inferior to men (Kamla, 2014). With regard to political participation, women's participation in the Syrian Parliament was only 12% in 2007 (Dahlerup, 2009).

Although women, as mentioned above, were encouraged to continue their education and find job opportunities, the societal and cultural dominant perception was that women were first and foremost housewives. Totah (2013) argues that the economic crisis in the 2000s reinforced this perception. The economic crisis and unemployment led the regime to focus on women's role as caregivers and housewives rather than active contributors to the nation's economy. The regime used the conservative Islamic position on women's domestic roles to achieve this goal. Totah shows that after the economic crisis, politicians used religion to justify giving work opportunities to men, controlling women, shaping their role in the community, and limiting women's access to the public sphere. According to Totah (2013), only the educated, elite, secular Syrian women who are in close connection to the regime were given the freedom to access the public and political sphere. As such, the engagement of Syrian women in the public sphere is directly linked to their political affiliation.

Syrian Women and the 2011 Uprising

As mentioned earlier, the Al Ba'ath party has controlled Syria since 1963. The above sections highlighted how the party dominated the political scene and restricted civil society. The sections also explained the party's ideology and its perception of women. The next section introduces the Syrian women's movement and provides an overview of the role of Syrian women in the uprising of 2011.

During the 1980s, secular and religious movements opposing the regime emerged. Generally speaking, these movements called for democratic change and equal rights for all citizens. Due to the restrictive political environment, these movements mostly operated in exile (Landis and Pace, 2007). The 'Syrian Sisterhood' is one of the most well-known religious

movements. It is part of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was declared illegal after being smashed in Hama's massacre. In early 1980, the military force headed by the regime attacked Hama to end the rebellion led by some of the Muslim Brotherhood, and it ended in the death of more than 10,000 civilians (Al-Saleh & White, 2013). This incident not only resulted in creating cultural fear in Syria but also pushed the religious parties to turn to secret movements. Many of its leaders took refuge out of Syria and held their meetings online. The Syrian Sisterhood gained great recognition because of its charities and their provision of financial aid to the Syrian Brotherhood (Sayed, 2020).

Another popular Islamic revivalist group among the Syrian Sunni Muslims Women (SSMW) is Al Qubaysiat. The movement was initiated by women who were interested in learning about Islam. However, it is agreed upon that the regime controlled the movement. Due to its close connection with the regime, it was allowed to move its activities targeting women to mosques instead of homes. With the uprising of 2011, many Qubaysiat members were sympathetic to the revolution's demands. A small number left the movement and joined the revolution, whereas the majority remained silent out of fear. Given that Qubaysiat was a Sunni Muslim, it was used by the Al-Assad regime and became visible in the official Syrian channels as the Muslim Sunni ally of the Assad regime. They attended a meeting with Bashar Al-Assad and his wife, showing the SSMW's solidarity with the Syrian authority (Sayed, 2020).

According to Cole & Cole (2011), Syrian women's movements were marginalized and excluded and only found a space with the 2011 revolution to make their voices heard. Szanto (2016) explained how Syrian women appeared on the Syrian public scene with the 2011 uprisings. For the first time and after decades of oppression, the image of Syrian female protesters began to

circulate among the Arab media, occupying the screens and reflecting how these women were thirsty for the political freedom of Syria. Al Natour (2020) pointed out that with the breakout of the revolution, many women who did not have any prior experience of active involvement in politics appeared on the Syrian scene. According to Al Natour, the typical and traditional gender role in Syria was exposed to challenges after the revolution. The Bayda women's rallies constitute an example of one of the most powerful demonstrations that were led by women who had never engaged in politics.

Even though the demand of the rallies focused on freeing their imprisoned husbands and male relatives, it played an important role in bringing women together as a collective power (Al Natour, 2020). To emphasize the role of women in the 2011 revolution. Moreover, one of the Fridays was labeled with the name “Harair” or Free Women Friday, as a sign of solidarity with the Syrian women revolutionaries (Aubin-Boltanski & Khalbous, 2022). The new political situation in Syria following the collapse of the regime's control over large Syrian territories created both threats and opportunities for Syrian women's role in the community. Eisenlohr (2011) believed that the Internet and social media allowed activism to counterweight the common culture of fear in Syria and expand the network of civil society. Moreover, the internet paved the way for e-magazines to tackle women’s issues and raise awareness about women’s rights in Syria. *Thara* is one of these e-magazines that is part of Etana Press, an organization that gets support from Western non-governmental organizations. This type of online activism created a new space for women to meet, share information, discuss important issues concerning women, and distribute and disseminate these ideas.

Nonetheless, this new public sphere caters to a small segment of Syrian women due to the limited access of the majority of women to the internet; in addition, this public space was unsafe as the security kept an eye on these Websites. In other words, social media played a huge role in mobilizing the Syrian revolution in 2011, but the mobilization of women was limited because of their limited access to the internet (Eisenlohr, 2011). Despite the limited mobilization, the political role played by women was recognized and respected as an act of bravery. Such bravery was perceived as a result of the subjection of women to years of dictatorship and repression (Szanto 2016). Although the armed conflict limited Syrian women's mobility, it created a space for Syrian women to be active and creative.

For example, Majd Sharbaji, an activist in the revolution, founded Enab Baladi Newspaper. Other Syrian women activists on social media include Suad Nufal, Zeina Erhiam, and Ward Najjar. Most of these journalists were trained in Syria on the basics of written and visual journalism (Sharbaji, 2016).

Gilbert (2020), in her article "Sister Citizens: Women in Syrian rebel governance," highlights that women's political mobility is determined by women's organizational capacity and the ideology of the armed groups in Syria. For example, areas controlled by conservative opposition groups restricted women's involvement in particular fields, limiting women's work to only nursing and teaching. In areas controlled by ISIS, many feminist organizations have been attacked and harassed. Women activists faced various forms of violence, such as visual and verbal harassment, as well as attempts to defame them (Gilbert, 2020).

Since 2011, Syrian women have started to growingly appear in the Syrian scene, either at the national level inside Syria or at the international level to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis. With the escalating violence in Syria, and more specifically in 2013, after using chemical weapons to attack Eastern Ghouta in Damascus, the Security Council called for implementing the Geneva Communique, a plan issued by the Action Group for Syria to call all parties in Syria to engage in serious and constructive discussion in an attempt to achieve stability in the country. In 2014, despite the Geneva Communique's call for women's representation, no women were present, neither on behalf of the UN nor the Syrian opposition or the regime (Moore & Talarico, 2015). Theros and Turkmani (2022) pointed out that the first two Geneva consultations led by the UN Special Representatives failed to include women and civil society representatives.

To conclude this section, Syrian women's presence in the public and political sphere was controlled by the regime, as shown in tracing the history of Syria since the outset of the twentieth century. Work and education were the main space for women to appear in the public sphere in light of the general restrictions imposed on the civil society movements in Syria. The Syrian regime totally controlled the public sphere, and the intelligence agencies closely monitored any movement. As education was the main pillar of the Ba'ath party in Syria, it secured all citizens' elementary and higher education equally. In 1995, half of the university students were female, but the employment rate of women outside their homes increased only by 5% (Sparre, 2008).

Regarding political and civil rights, Syrian men and women were deprived of the right to explore civil society and engage in community work. Therefore, women faced two levels of restrictions; the first one was caused by the patriarchal society, and the second by the government. The patriarchal nature of the Syrian community continued after the 2011 uprising, but the uprising

brought opportunities that challenged traditional gender roles. However, with the transformation of the revolution into a proxy war and with the escalation of the violence, many Syrians fled the country to start a new life in displacement (Al Natour, 2020).

3. The Egyptian Women's Movement

The Egyptian women's movement is the oldest in the Arab region. The movement passed through four distinct phases. The first phase covers the period from the start of the movement in the last quarter of the 19th century till the 1952 military coup. The second phase was from 1952 to the late 1970s. The third phase was from the 1980s to 2011 and the fourth phase was from 2011 to present (Kamal, 2016). This section will elaborate on each of the four phases, highlighting the achievements of Egyptian women in terms of their ability to access the public sphere. As mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, measuring access to the public sphere refers to measuring the degree by which women gained access to education, employment, and involvement in community work.

The first phase

According to Baron (2005), the participation of Egyptian women in the 1919 revolution marked the beginning of the feminist movement in Egypt. Following the revolution, Egyptian women from the middle and upper classes organized themselves to advocate for women's rights. Examples of women-led organizations in the 19920s include Women's Wafd, Mothers of the Future, and Egyptians Ladies' Awakening. The movement was elitist as the main protagonists of these organizations belonged to the upper and upper middle classes. For example, activists during this phase included Safiyya Zaghlul, the wife of the revolutionist leader and statesman Sa'd basha

Zaghlul and Huda Sha'rawi, the daughter of Mohamed Sultan Pasha. Just like other similar associations at that time, women's organizations pursued programs aimed at promoting the education of women. The scale and visibility of these women-led organizations went on a larger scale in the interwar years of the First and Second World Wars (Baron, 2005).

The Egyptian women's movement in the early 1920s was influenced by Qasem Amin who pursued his education in France and was inspired by European intellectuals. The upper middle class to which Amin belonged, many among them were educated in Europe, were very much influenced by European political and social ideas. Back in Egypt, Qasem Amin strongly advocated for girls' education as a necessary means for the nation's development; also called for the unveiling of Egyptian women. The movement remained elitist as its ideas were discussed and debated in schools, cultural salons, and associations but not among the public. Amin's calls for the importance of women's education were also endorsed by religious nationalists, such as Mustafaa Kamal, Fatima Rashid, and Muhammad Farid Wajd. However, they opposed the unveiling spreading among the elitist class, arguing that women's empowerment should not contradict Islamic culture de facto. Moreover, they urged to provide models for women and families from the Islamic culture (Baron, 2005).

As mentioned above, among the early women activists was Huda Sha'rawi. She was one of the pioneers in establishing philanthropy associations that aimed not only to provide social assistance to vulnerable women and children but also to create initiatives that generated work opportunities. She was among the leaders of the 1919 revolution, one of the founders of Al Wafd Women, and the founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union. Kahf (1998) asserted that, by such actions, she was clearly announcing that women do not belong to the domestic sphere only. In

1923, she made her famous move by removing her face cover (niqab) upon returning to Cairo from Rome where she was attending the International Feminist Conference (Kahf, 1998). Sha'rawi regarded the uncovering of the face as a liberal move against patriarchal and social oppression, hoping it would lead to transforming cultural aspects and opening more spheres to women in the community (Quawas, 2006).

In 1938, the Egyptian Feminist Union, headed by Sha'rawi organized in Cairo the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine (Weber, 2008). Although Shar'wi was inspired by Western culture and took Western women as her model, this did not entail her rejection of the Islamic beliefs in her movement. In her view, Islam advocates for equality between men and women and for women to enjoy their rights in the family and society (Quawas, 2006). According to Kahf (1998), Sha'rawi contributed to the modern Egyptian nation-state that influenced other Egyptian feminists, like Doria Shafik. In addition, her efforts paved the way to attain more rights for women in the Egyptian constitution, like setting the minimum age for girls' marriage (Quawas, 2006).

This first phase, as such, was characterized by focusing on educational rights. According to Badran (2011), by 1940, there were four women-led organizations that continued to call for educational rights. In 1952, the Free Officers Movement staged a coup, forcing King Farouk to abdicate. Bier (2011) illustrated that this date was marked as a revolution because it transformed Egypt from being a monarchy into a republic.

The Second Phase

Throughout the 1950s, attention was given to women's political rights. The activism of women-led organizations continued until women gained the right to vote in 1956 and got full citizenship rights equal to men (Badran, 1994). Subsequently, in 1957, two women were elected to the National Assembly, and, as a result, women's voices were represented in the parliament (Guenena & Wassef, 1999). In the early 1960s, Nasser, the second president of the Egyptian republic, adopted a nationalization program, a unified national development project and mobilized previously marginalized groups, such as workers, peasants, and women, through the creation of corporatist institutions and professional syndicates. In the 1960s, Egypt was promoted as a socialist country where all citizens had equal rights and duties. Nasser's regime attempted to mobilize women from all social classes by granting them the right to work in different public sectors and the newly nationalist industries, in addition to issuing economic and social policies to expand women's work opportunities in the state (Bier, 2011).

Nasser used the media to promote the victory of the state's policy and the incorporation of women in such policy by taking photos on sites like Qina's factory with women workers. This photo is considered an erosion of the social norms that prevented women from participating in building the glory of their nations together with their male community members (Bier, 2011). Despite these actions and photos, Bier explained that Nasser, in his book, Philosophy of the Revolution, did not mention women's role in the new era. Although women got the right to participate in the military, women were almost virtually absent during the late 1950s period. Unlike female members of the royal family, who were well-known among the Egyptians, the Free officers' wives were absent from the scene. This period marked the beginning of what became known as 'State Feminism' where the state co-opted women's organizations so that they became part of the

state and incorporated into the national plan to develop Egypt rather than being independent (Kamal, 2016).

According to Bier (2011), many of the feminist demands were achieved in the 1950s and 1960s, including voting rights, protective legalizations concerning working women, and the inclusion of women in the education system. However, with the new republic, political rights were restricted in the name of Egypt's national plan. Both men and women lost their freedom to express their thoughts and all civil society organizations were controlled and co-opted by the regime (Badran, 1994). Female activists like Duriyya Shafiq, who came from a middle-class family and led the women's protest to gain the right to vote in 1956, were accused of being bourgeois reactionary for the mere cause of her criticism of the regime (Bier, 2011).

State's control over civil society organizations continued throughout the 1970s. However, the period was characterized by ambiguity with regard to women' rights. On the one hand, in an attempt to challenge Nasser's supporters, Sadat, the third president of the Egyptian republic, opened the space for the Muslim Brotherhood. He allowed them to be present in the public sphere and gave them a free hand on university campuses (Guenena and Wassef 1999). Moreover, he amended the constitution to include an article declaring shari'a as the main source of government legislation. However, on the other hand, his wife, Jehan El Sadat, was an advocate for women's rights, particularly advocating to reform the personal status law. With pressure from feminist organizations, Sadat attempted to reform the personnel status law to grant women the right to judicial divorce if their husbands engaged in a second marriage. With opposition from Al-Azhar and the Muslim Brotherhood, the supreme court declared the law invalid (Mhajne, 2022). Another example of the ambiguity during this period is that despite the fact that the law saw women as

independent citizens, law 137 of 1981 conditions adequate protection for women to allow them to work at night in hotels, airports, and theaters (Guenena & Wassef, 1999).

During his presidency, Sadat adopted an open-door economic policy. The policy, however, failed to address the high level of poverty and unemployment. Given the demand for labor from the newly developed Gulf countries, labor migration was encouraged by Sadat and incorporated in the 1971 constitution as a right for Egyptian citizens. The vast majority of migrants were men, but few highly educated women migrated to occupy positions in the education and medical field. Medium and low-skilled migrants, on the other hand, migrated alone, leaving their wives behind in Egypt. Egyptian women whose husbands migrated were forced to take over responsibilities and tasks previously taken by men, increasing as such their access to the public sphere (Al-Ali, 2000).

The lack of economic information for women from the middle and lower classes deprived them of participation in the new business atmosphere that existed in Egypt after the policy of the open door, "infetah," in the 1980s to the Arab and Western economies. A limited number of work positions were available for women at all levels of the occupational ladder (Al-Ali, 2000). Moreover, Guenena and Wassef questioned the aim of women's education in the first place. In the Egyptian community, girls' education is valued since it enhances women's role as wives and mothers and enables them to fend for themselves if they need to progress in the public sphere. Therefore, the media represents the image of women as interwoven into the social fabric. As wives, daughters, and sisters, women always need protection from husbands, fathers, and brothers. (Guenena & Wassef, 1999).

The Third Phase

With the assassination of Sadat in 1981, control of civil society organizations was loosened. Al-Ali (2000) declared that women activists used this window to form many associations and civic organizations that focus on the role of women in development. More importantly, Egypt committed itself to eliminating discrimination against women by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. Moreover, in 1994, Egypt hosted the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). During this conference, Egyptian civil society organizations emerged as the most knowledgeable body on women's rights. Topics addressed by women activist-led organizations during this period focused on women's bodies and sexualities, discussing issues like violence against women, women's reproductive rights, and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Kamal, 2016).

The visibility of civil society organizations during the ICPD conference and the level of knowledge they demonstrated led the state to revive its State Feminism policy by initiating the National Council for Women (NCW). According to Kamal (2016), the aim of establishing the NCW was to contain and counter civil society's representation of Egyptian women's issues. Also, according to Al-Ali (2000), Mubarak's government presented itself as abiding by women's rights and the values of democracy. That opened the door slightly to the women activists who work for international and national organizations. International organizations are semi-independent from the state and remain autonomous from the state authorities; however, it is heavenly shaped by international intervention. All the previously mentioned activities went in parallel with the increasing demands directed to the Egyptian government to respect and implement women's rights following the UN Conventions.

In 1998, with pressure from national non-government organizations and international donor organizations, the government amended the Law of Association (32), which was used to control the women's groups and activists (Al-Ali, 2000). Another important development during this phase is the rise of the movement that is commonly referred to as Islamic Feminism. Islamic feminism emerged in the 1990s as a reaction to the Islamist movements and the fear of its attempts to impose and promote a conservative interpretation of Islam. While secular feminists challenge patriarchal interpretations of the Quran and hadith (the sayings of the prophet Muhammad) with modern universal secular values, Islamic feminism challenges such interpretation through moderate interpretations of the Islamic texts (Mhajne, 2022). While secular feminists consider the veil as a sign of backwardness (Guenena and Wassef 1999), Islamic feminists consider it a strategy to confirm their presence in conservative societies (Mhajne, 2022). Many scholars have agreed upon the perception of the veil as an attempt to increase its presence in the public sphere. For example, Philipe Fargues (2002) argued that the veil in the Egyptian context facilitates rather than hinders women's freedom of movement.

Despite the calls from the conservative Islamist oppositional groups for employed women from the middle class to return home and depend on men's income, this strategy was not feasible for working-class women who were the head of households (Hatem, 2005). Rizk and Abou-Ali (2013) stated that women's contribution to the household budget through finding opportunities in the informal sector increased starting from the year 2000. Although the literacy rate reaches 69%, the informal sector absorbs women with low education, uneducated, unskillful women, and those engaged in elementary professions. These women aim to work and cover their marriage goals; after marriage, they continue to struggle to improve their income levels and meet their families' needs.

The Fourth Phase

On the 25th of January 2011, Egypt witnessed an unprecedented revolution where both men and women from all classes and walks of life protested against Mubarek's regime. Egyptian women played an instrumental role in the revolution as they represented almost half of the protestors (Khattab, 2012). Since the 2011 revolution, two main issues occupied Egyptian feminists: sexual violence against women and the inclusion of women's rights in the new constitution (Kamal 2016). Organized sexual violence was used in an attempt to exclude women from participating in the protests (Allam, 2022).

Consequently, the phase following the revolution is witnessing the development of various anti-harassment groups that are making themselves present in key positions during protests and holidays. While the focus during this period shifted toward women's bodies and sexuality, the struggle for civil and political rights continued. For example, in an attempt to improve political participation, the quota system was introduced. In the parliament of 2014, 64 seats from 518 total seats were reserved for women. Unfortunately, however, the state manipulated the quota system as the majority of seats were occupied by senior state figures and members of the ruling party and the National Council of Women (Kamal, 2016).

Examples of the spread of anti-sexual harassment campaigns include the establishment of a unit to combat sexual harassment and violence against women at Cairo University and in government ministries. Moreover, the issue of sexual harassment against women is addressed regularly in traditional and social media (Kamal 2016). With regard to inclusion in the new constitution, the Women and Constitution Group was formed, including feminists from feminist

NGOs and human rights organizations, as well as independent feminist activists and researchers (Al-Ali, 2000).

The four phases of the Egyptian feminist movement explained above indicate that Egyptian women have been active throughout the twentieth century to gain their economic, social, and political life. Women were recognized in the political sphere, calling for women's rights, like the right to education. Regardless of the level of achievements the women's movement gained in each phase, Egyptian women managed to handle the movement from one generation to another and keep it alive through the different phases. For example, in the 1920s, Sha'rawi contributed to the modern Egyptian nation-state that influenced other Egyptian feminists, like Doria Shafik, who essentially contributed to getting the right to vote.

Also, the economic situation forced women to expand their access to the public sphere by taking on their husbands' responsibilities after the migration of Egyptian men to Gulf countries in the 1980s. Then, women's need to gain money increased, so their presence in the informal market became more visible in the 1990s and 200s. In addition, women's movement demands evolved to cope with the context of each era. Women's rights were always on the agenda of the feminist non-government organizations that had the space to operate in civil society. In addition to the flourishing of the NGOs that were supported by UN agencies to promote human and women's rights. However, these movements were mainly known to middle-upper class and highly educated women. With the 2011 revolution, Egypt witnessed an unprecedented presence of men and women from all classes participating in the revolution.

4. Analyzing the Difference between the Syrian and Egyptian Women's Movements:

Reviewing Syrian and Egyptian history and spotting light on women's situation in each country indicates that the intersection between the political, economic, and social factors shapes women's access to the public sphere. On the one hand, the two Arab countries have similarities regarding women's participation in the independence movements and the Arab Spring, their calls for political rights, their access to education, and the hegemony of the patriarchal society. On the other hand, differences are observed, particularly with regard to access to civil society and the type of economic activity.

In terms of similarity between the two countries, firstly, both countries witnessed women's participation in calling for independence from the occupation in the early 1920s until they gained independence. Afterward, women activists in Syria and Egypt could still be seen in the political and public sphere calling for rights, like access to education and suffrage. Indeed, these efforts met women's goals despite the challenges they faced. In the 1950s, women in both countries gained the right to vote and to be elected to the Parliament. In Syria, the percentage of women in parliament declined from 12% in 2010 to 11%, in 2022 while in Egypt, the percentage increased from 13% in 2010 to 28% in 2022 (World Bank Data, 2022). Although women in these two Arab countries held seats in the parliament, their participation in the parliament did not reach the globally acknowledged 30 percent (Dahlerup, 2009).

Secondly, in Syria and Egypt, the fruits of the efforts to get the right to education translated into sufficient results in the late 1980s and 1990s when statistics showed that women in both countries represented almost 50% of university students. However, the increase in access to

education has yet to translate into access to the skillful labor market and managerial positions. Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, Arab women's access to the workforce in general does not exceed 25%. According to Nasser (2018), women's career path is limited by the glass ceiling policy in the Arab world. Thirdly, scholars in the sections on Syria and Egypt illustrate that the hegemony of the patriarchal society is another similar point between the two countries. Although women get the chance to be educated, they are still imprisoned by the image of the housewife and are not seen as competitors to men in the workplace. Moreover, their capacity and skills are always subject to question when they get leadership positions.

Similar to Al Ba'ath policy, Egyptian media in the 1970s enforced the patriarchal traditional image of an ideal woman who prioritized her role as a housewife over her career. Finally, although male policymakers in both countries sometimes attempted to amend the constitutions and issue progressive laws in favor of women, like for example the law extending the age of compulsory education in Syria, the real intention behind these laws, some scholars argue, is for other purposes like reducing fertility or promoting a better image to the outside world. Furthermore, women's increased representation in parliament has not improved women's position in both countries.

The main differences regarding the situation of women in both countries is with regard to the space given to civil society. As indicated in this chapter, civil society organizations were dissolved in both Syria and Egypt during Nasser's regime and the union between the two countries. Such a policy of restriction continued in Syria with the Ba'ath Party that came to power in 1971 and is still in place till today. The situation is different in Egypt which witnessed political and economic changes since Nasser.

Even though civil society in Egypt faced and continues to face challenges, it continues to exist. Moreover, the shift in economic policies in Egypt resulted in women taking over more responsibilities outside their homes. For instance, the liberalization Sadat implemented after the 1973 war neither rescued the Egyptian economy nor reduced poverty. A wave of migration toward Gulf countries started in light of the economic crisis and lack of work opportunities. Women at that time became responsible for their homes and interacting more with the public sphere in the absence of their men.

Moreover, with the growth of the population, rural-urban migration increased, and the number of educated unemployed women increased. Nevertheless, women appeared in the public sphere replacing their husbands in doing their tasks. Furthermore, opening the space to international organization following the organization of the ICPD conference in Cairo in 1994, gave women organizations the chance to receive international funds.

To conclude, even though the Egyptian women's movement went through difficulties, they continued to be present in the public sphere until the Arab Spring. In contrast, Syrian women's presence in the public sphere has frozen since the late 1950s. During the Arab Spring, Syrian and Egyptian women participated in their nations' movements and called for freedom and democratic change. As their grandmothers, they were blooming through the cracks of the historical events to demonstrate their existence and right to be recognized. Attention must be drawn to Ebadi's (2012), who asserted the need for women's full participation in civil society in order to say that Arab countries can be democratic.

IV. Chapter Four: Access to the Public Sphere

This chapter and the next chapter will introduce the findings of the fieldwork conducted from February through June 2023 with forty-one Syrian men and women who moved to Egypt after 2011. These findings are derived from two sets of in-depth interviews conducted with 13 women and seven men, in addition to holding two Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with 21 women.

As explained in the first chapter of this thesis, by public spaces and public activities, the thesis means any activity that involves dealing with the public, including engagement in income-generating activities, dealing with the bureaucracy in terms of renewing residency permits or paying bills, etc., and engagement in community work.

The first section of this chapter will briefly explain the profile of the 34 Syrian women interviewed, highlighting their background in Syria. The remainder of the chapter will assess the degree of their involvement in public activities by assessing their engagement in three kinds of public activities and comparing such engagement to the level of their engagement in these activities in Syria. The three activities are: dealing with bureaucracy, engagement in community work, and engagement in paid work.

The next chapter, which is the final chapter, will analyze the findings in terms of how women and men perceive the increased involvement of women in the public sphere.

1. Participants' Profile

The 34 Syrian women who participated in the research for this thesis live in four neighborhoods in Cairo and Giza: Obour City and Nasr City in Cairo and Faysal/Haram and 6th of October City in Giza. 25 participants came from the rural areas around Damascus and other cities, and 10 participants used to live in cities in Syria. All participants were between the ages of 20 and 50. Regarding the educational level, four participants were illiterate, eight finished elementary schools, nine completed secondary school, 12 had Bachelor's Degrees, and two held Master degrees. The majority of them came to Egypt as families and have been in Egypt since 2011. 23 out of the 34 interviewed are married, eight are divorced, two are widows, and one is single. Five out of the eight who are divorced got divorced in Egypt. 30 out of 34 interviewees are registered with UNHCR as asylum seekers; however, only 11 of them get assistance from UNHCR. Only 10 of the women interviewed contribute to the household's income.

As explained in the methodology section of chapter two, the data collection for this thesis focused initially on in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were carried out in 6th of October City and Nasr City. Realizing that many of the participants are highly educated and belong to the middle class, the researcher decided to interview additional women. As such, the researcher carried out two FGDs: one in Obour City in Cairo and one in Faysal/Haram in Giza. Participants in the FGD in Obour had the highest percentage of uneducated women. During the FGD, the limited access to education was highlighted by the participants as an indication of the patriarchal system.

For example, Ekram, one of the young mothers in the FGD in Obour, stated, "*Some fathers encourage education for girls, while others allow their daughters to get the elementary certificate only. They believe that women have to be good wives and mothers, so there is no need for higher education.*" Ekram, who expressed her frustration from not continuing her education, left school at the elementary level. The women in the FGD who did not complete their education did so based on the decision of the male figure in the family. Although some of these women expressed their willingness to continue their education, the men in the families consider this level of education sufficient for women to raise their children.

2. Engagement in Public Activities

2.1 Dealing with the Bureaucracy

This section will present and analyze the findings of the research in terms of Syrian women's accessibility to the public sphere through bearing some of the men's responsibilities outside the home, represented by dealing with authorities and strangers. Table (1a) below summarizes the answer of the interviewed women to the question, "*Have you taken additional responsibilities that traditionally were undertaken by men upon moving to Egypt*?" As the table indicates, 10 out of the 12 women who participated in the FGD carried out in Obour city, eight out of nine who participated in the focus group discussion carried out in Haram, and 11 out of the 12 who participated in the in-depth interviews answered yes to this question.

Table (1a)

Have you taken additional responsibilities that traditionally were undertaken by men upon moving to Egypt?	Yes	No
Obour FGD (12 participants)	10	2
Haram FGD (9 participants)	8	1
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	11	2
Total: 34	29	5

When asked about the kinds of responsibilities and why they increased, the interviewees explained that they now have direct contact with the authorities to run their residency and registration papers for their children at schools. Also, they indicated that they have to leave their homes to get the household's needs by themselves and approach service providers like Syrian-led Organizations (SLOs), INGOs, and IOs. In contrast, back in Syria, all these tasks were done mainly by men. Taking men's responsibility was agreed upon by the majority of the participants, as indicated in the above table, regardless of their age or their education level. Most women in the interviews and the FGDs indicated that they replaced their men in many of their responsibilities outside their homes. The reason behind the increased involvement in such responsibility is the fact that men are the main breadwinner, and they cannot take such responsibility with work. Most of the bureaucratic tasks that are undertaken by women are done during the day and men cannot leave their work because taking leaves means deducting from the husband's salary, which is the main source of income for the families. As such, by taking over some of the men's tasks, women save the household income from being decreased.

The responsibilities of women outside the household increased despite the fact that they and their husbands expressed worry about their safety in Egypt as one of the participants said, "*You know, in displacement, we are not safe, and men are always worried about our safety in Egypt*." However, despite the restrictions their male counterparts impose on their movement, they still delegate many responsibilities to them in order to survive in Egypt.

While the majority agreed that their responsibilities outside the household increased with displacement, there were some variations in terms of the extent of taking such responsibilities. The difference was particularly apparent during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). For example, older married women face fewer restrictions than younger married women and unmarried ones. As such, women's marital status and age prove to contribute to the type of tasks and trust women receive from their male partners.

As mentioned earlier, Obour, a remote city, has the highest level of uneducated Syrian women. However, the low level of education is not the only difference between the Obour's group and the other groups. It was apparent during the FGD in Obour that most participants are from rural areas and adhere to a conservative lifestyle. As such, their living conditions in displacement, such as abiding strictly by their conservative traditions and gender roles, are an extension of their lifestyle at home. This relates to Afkhami's argument (1994), explained in the literature review section. Afkhami emphasizes that, in displacement, gender norms do not change when the displaced communities act as an extension of the homeland community in terms of maintaining the distribution of gender roles between men and women, viz., females remained financially dependent on male figures.

Some signs that indicate this group maintains the Syrian traditions in rural areas are the tradition of wearing dark clothes (coats and hair covers), which was even evident during the FGDs. Another example is the high percentage of girls dropping out of school at the age of 15, which is the maximum age for compulsory education in Syria.

By contrast, more than half of the FGD participants in Haram, a densely populated area, are educated women with either a secondary certificate or a university degree; also, half of them are young mothers. One of the participants explains, "*Now women are subject to doing stuff like taking kids to school and doing some (government) papers, so we have to know how to use transportation and commute in Cairo alone or with other female company from the Syrian neighbors*." The quote draws attention to women's solidarity in supporting each other while doing this type of responsibility and how they gather to move in groups to have a better sense of safety. Many of the participants in the Haram FGDs explained how they were influenced by the Egyptian women who are visible in the public sphere by working, dealing with strangers, and being able to raise their voices and stand for their rights.

This is reflected in the fact that some of the women in this group try to work in the Egyptian informal market. Suzan, one of the participants in Haram's FGD, is a mother of three children, two of whom are registered in a public school. Even though she had recently arrived in Egypt with her husband and children, she was deeply interested in the topic, and she agreed with the other ladies that displacement opened the door for her to explore the public sphere. Suzan studied Arabic literature at Damascus University, but she did not work in Syria because her father refused to let her work after graduation.

Then, after marriage, her husband decided that there was no need for her to work. She said, "*I don't work, but I support my husband in his responsibilities outside the home: doing the residency, getting the education grant for the kids, getting the grocery. So, he feels that I am doing him a favor and sharing the burden with him. Although I don't work, I can say that I have become stronger, and I participate in decision-making at home."*

It is worth mentioning that most of the participants in the FGD agreed with Susan and shared the same opinion as hers.

The women who participated in the individual interviews confirmed as well the increased responsibility of women upon moving to Egypt. This group has the highest level of education among the other groups. Despite their higher education level, most of them do not work mostly because they can't work in their fields in the formal market. However, some of them were able to secure temporary informal jobs. Aya, who is in her 50s and a graduate of a teacher's institution at Damascus University, argued that in addition to registering children at school, applying/renewing residency, and looking for additional financial support, women need to be familiar and updated with the new regulations and services available for Syrians in Cairo. Likewise, Reem, a social worker volunteer at SLO called Watan for Development, which provides social services for Syrians, stated that in the 6th of October, most women are responsible for registering at the UNHCR, getting the grocery, doing the residency procedure, and registering children at schools.

So, even if women are not working, they must learn how to do the previously-mentioned responsibilities to cope with daily life in Egypt. Thus, they should know all the details related to these things by communicating and socializing with others. "*Whereas in Syria, we used to be*

conservative and not open for public conversations," said Reem, who got divorced after she came to Egypt and is now the primary breadwinner for her children. While she was talking, it was apparent that she was proud of herself and her ability to survive without a man in her life. Sereen, another participant who volunteers as a receptionist at 'Syria Al Gad' Association, confirmed that most of those who approach their office seeking assistance, job opportunities, training, or awareness sessions are women whose husbands work in factories or the informal sectors and cannot take hourly leaves.

Based on the data provided above, it can be concluded that the responsibility of women outside the private sphere and their exposure to public life increased with their move to Egypt. This finding also applies to the Obour group, where most of the participants do not work, and their mobility is somehow restricted because of their conservative lifestyle. Despite that, they still share some of their husbands' responsibilities outside the home.

As explained earlier, giving women the responsibility to engage in public activities is attributed to the fact that Syrian men in Egypt are working longer hours as compared to Syria. In Syria, men used to have more stable jobs, and some had their own businesses. As such, they were able to balance their time and responsibilities outside the home. As a result, they did not have to let their wives do any outside-home tasks. Participants explained that the life expenses in Egypt are higher compared to Syria. The major expenses are rent, residency fees, and school fees. In Syria, most families owned their houses. Having to pay rent in Egypt added a huge weight to their monthly expenses.

With regard to residency cost, it reaches 800 Egyptian pounds for each individual in the family, and it is subject to renewal every six months. Furthermore, the cost of renewing the Syrian passport is 300 USD, and this is an additional burden on those who are not registered with UNHCR or those who are registered with UNHCR and have the asylum seekers card but do not use it to acquire residency on it.

All these expenses meant that Syrian men needed to spend more time in income-generating activities to meet their livelihood expenses in Egypt. Moreover, as Bahgat (2015) highlighted, Syrian women, as compared to men, have fewer opportunities to work in Egypt. This was also indicated by the research for this thesis explained in (Table 1 b) below:

Table (1b)

Source of Income	Husband	Wife	Both	Parents
Obour FGD (12 participants)	12	0	0	0
Haram FGD (9 participants)	8	0	1	0
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	1	7	3	2
Total: 34	21	7	4	2

The table above highlights that the number of Syrian women who contribute to their households in Egypt is very limited compared to men. This could be attributed to the fact that most opportunities are available in the informal sector due to the legal restriction on accessing the formal market (Hassan 2021). Given that the informal market is known for being risky and unstable and exposes the workers to increased vulnerability and possible exploitation (Ayoub and Khallaf 2014), most women are hesitant or restricted by their husbands to engage in this sector.

2.2 Engagement in Community Work

This section will explain the degree to which Syrian women became engaged in community work according to three levels: attending activities organized by IOs, INGOs, NGOs, and SLOs, volunteering in community activities, and initiating community activities.

2.2.1 Attending Activities by IOs, INGOs, NGOs and SLOs

The table below (Table 2) summarizes the answer to the question, "*Have you ever attended sessions or activities organized by IOs, INGO, NGOs, or Syrian-led organizations since you arrived to Egypt"*?"

Table (2)

Attended Sessions or Activities by IOs, INGOs , NGO, or Syrian-led organizations	Yes	No
Obour FGD (12 participants)	10	2
Haram FGD (9 participants)	9	0
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	12	1
Total: 34	31	3

As per the table above, the majority of the participants in the fieldwork of this study have attended awareness sessions or activities organized by service providers organizations, whether local, international, or Syrian-led organizations. One of the participants commented on that, saying:

Syrian led organizations are a good space for Syrian women to gather. Also, INGOs are another place where Syrian women can meet and support each other by sharing their

different knowledge. Some can benefit from this gathering as they get to know the best place to get the courses, while others connect you with job and volunteering opportunities.

Many reports document the importance of these spaces for refugees and asylum seekers. For example, a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report in 2021 highlighted that organizations like 'Care International,' created safe spaces for refugee women and offered them legal, gender-based violence and women's rights sessions. Also, according to the Catholic Relief Services' website, they provide Syrian women with vocational training opportunities in addition to educational grants for their children (CRS, 2019). Such attempts by IOs, INGOs and NGOs to provide spaces for training and self-awareness are considered by some scholars as a shift. Rosenberg (2016) explains that at the beginning of the Syrian crisis, service providers in Egypt gave more attention to relief services. Yet, in time and as the funds were minimized, service providers' attention shifted to awareness and vocational training instead.

Such spaces create opportunities for Syrian women to expand their knowledge, network, and skills. This is especially true for those who are still living in Egypt under the same restrictions they used to have back in Syria; the participants from Obour provide a good example. Although this group kept the conservative Syrian traditions which were obvious by their way of dressing and the restrictions they mentioned on their mobility by their male family members, they were looking forward to resume the awareness sessions they used to attend at 'Care International' and 'Save the Children.' These sessions were about women's rights, psychosocial support, medical topics, how to coach social life, and awareness raising about early marriage.

According to the Obour group's ladies, these sessions ended in 2018, and they are longing to attend these sessions again as they consider it "*the space where Syrian women have the courage to participate*." In addition, these women asserted, "*We like to meet each other and discuss topics or even our common problems in a safe place.*" Some of these activities are now conducted in 'Syria Al Gad,' one of the SLOs in Obour, which is a "trusted place" by the Obour group ladies' male family members.

2.2.2 Volunteering in Community Activities

The definition of civic engagement adopted by this thesis and as presented in chapter one is that civic engagement refers to engagement with the community outside the political domain. This section aims to analyze the extent to which Syrian women are engaged in volunteering activities directed to their community in Egypt and the extent to which such involvement is empowering them. The section also compares such involvement to their involvement in community work in Syria.

Table (3) below summarizes the answer to the following question "*Have you Volunteered with IOs, NGOs, INGOs, and SLOs in Egypt?"*

Table (3)

Have you Volunteered with *IOs, NGOs,* INGOs, and SLOs in Egypt?	Yes	No
Obour FGD (12 participants)	0	12
Haram FGD (9 participants)	2	7
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	11	2
Total: 34	13	21

According to the table above (table 3), less than half of the Syrian women interviewed for this research do not volunteer for the community despite the fact that they are exposed to IOs, NGOs, INGOs, and SLOs in terms of attending community awareness session as highlighted in table (2). It is also clear from Table (3) that this finding is related to the education level. The vast majority of the women in the in-depth interviews, who are mostly educated, are engaged in volunteering activities. In contrast, the vast majority of the participants in the FGDs, who are mostly uneducated, are not engaged in volunteering activities. This is particularly true with regard to the Obour group who are leading a conservative lifestyle. None of the participants in this group are engaged in volunteering activities.

The researcher inquired about the reasons for not taking part in volunteering activities. The respondents indicated that they do want to take part but there are many obstacles hindering them. The obstacles can be summarized as follows: men's domination of women's mobility and activities outside the home, lack of skills and self-confidence, and security concerns. It is worth mentioning that the majority of these women do not have previous experience in volunteering back in Syria. However, those who were able to navigate the obstacles and find a way to actively engage in community work argued that this new experience changed their lives. For example, Masa is one of the Syrian woman interviewees, a mother of three children, and one of the most known social activists in the 6th of October area. She said,

> *Since 2013, after the divorce, I had to look for ways to change my way of life. I wanted to prove myself and get rid of my past image, which is, for me, being a voiceless doll. The divorce decision had been on my mind since I was in Syria, but I took it here as my ex-husband became more violent with me. I learned about CARE International from the*

awareness session I attended with them and got their assistance in getting divorced. Afterward, finding volunteering opportunities was my only solution to feel that I was still alive and could help my children and my community.

After the divorce, Masa aimed to prove herself and make a difference in her life. She found a volunteering opportunity at the safe space that Care International runs in the 6th of October city. She was responsible for organizing events for Syrian women and grouping them according to their interests in the available activities. She became a popular figure and the pioneer in founding a WhatsApp group for sharing information with Syrian women in Cairo. Since 2013, she has volunteered with the majority of Syrian-led organizations. Masa used to participate in activities like identifying vulnerable Syrian cases, distributing financial, medical, and in-kind donations, and doing field visits and case management with the social work departments. One year ago, she gained Egyptian nationality from her new Egyptian husband, and that allowed her to get a job opportunity with the Egyptian Red Crescent so that she could continue supporting her family and her community after a long experience in community work.

Reem, who works as a teacher at 'Watan Community School,' is another example. She had the chance to volunteer with the relief department at 'Watan for Development' during the summer. This opportunity made her discover the talents and abilities that are needed at Watan relief work. Reem pointed out that some of her tasks were to meet vulnerable families, assist in their needs, and participate in the social work panel to decide the organization's intervention with each family. After proving her skills, Watan nominated her to get psychosocial training through Saint Andrew Refugee Services (StARS), which provides services for refugees from different nationalities, and

that enhanced her skills and expanded her network. With high self-confidence, she shared her experience with me, saying,

> *In Syria, you have only family and friends. Here we create a new community at work and even friendships with people from different nationalities. The nature of my volunteering opened my mind to the diversity of the Syrian community. I meet families from all the Syrian governorates, and I hear their stories. I was involved in assisting their needs. Also, I became part of Watan meetings to make decisions on how to support the community.*

The interviewees who got engaged in volunteering opportunities used the opportunity to discover their abilities and skills. Huda, a mother of three children, came to Egypt in early 2013 with her husband. She was one of the women who lived in a very conservative community where her father and husband were the ones who made the decisions on her behalf. She elaborated,
"*In Syria, after the families (my family and my husband's family) decided to prevent me from continuing my education, I surrendered to the idea that I don't have the right to think and make decisions. I felt so tired of fighting with the two families just to let them hear my voice and opinion like it was all in vain, so I decided to choose the easy way and remain silent.*"

Things started to change for Huda after she came to Egypt with her husband and kids. Away from the two families' control, with a husband busy all the time at work and in a country full of services targeting Syrian women, Huda took her first step toward freedom. In the beginning, Huda took on some of her husband's responsibilities outside the home. Then, Huda became involved in the Syrian community in Cairo by joining groups on social media, which are operated mainly by women, to discuss the recent regulations, services, and news that concern Syrian in Egypt.

Huda got to know INGOs like Care International and Save the Children and attended some of their sessions. She thought of continuing her education in Egypt, but the fees were too high. After that, she decided to volunteer with many of the Syrian-led organizations in her area. Huda basically supports the activities of organizing, promoting, and implementing clothes distribution for vulnerable Syrian families. Also, she attended training on facilitation skills from Care International, enabling her to volunteer with Children's safe spaces. About this shift in her life, Huda demonstrated her feeling by saying,

> *"I started volunteering with a feeling that I was not enough, I couldn't be an addition, and I was not capable of doing anything outside the home. However, when I started working and doing activities, I discovered that I could do professional work. People at the volunteering entity were happy with my performance, and that doubled my confidence in myself and my skills."*

Another story is about a young Syrian lawyer, Tamara. She came to Egypt with her family in 2013, and she graduated from the Faculty of Law. Although in the first early years of displacement, her family restricted her movement because of their feeling of lack of security, things changed over time. Now, Tamara is volunteering with several organizations that support refugees in Cairo. She started to volunteer with StARS for Refugee Services in the community outreach department. She supported them in reaching out and identifying the needs of Syrian families. After that, she volunteered with the Law Advocate for Syria, a legal organization aimed to support Syrians by providing free legal consultations and using social media to keep Syrian refugees updated with the latest regulations in Egypt. Tamara's role was to organize training and outreach to the Syrian community, promoting the organization's services.

Tamara mentioned that she was influenced by a group of Syrian women who gathered themselves after attending a session with ‘Save the Children,’ aiming to share the knowledge they got with others. Furthermore, they created a group for Syrian women on social media to expand their circle of people. Upon her graduation from the Faculty of Law, Tamara focused on volunteering with Syrian-led organizations, like ‘Bunyan’ and ‘Syria Al Ghad,’ to give legal awareness sessions for Syrian women and men. As a Syrian, Tamara recognized a need for legal awareness within the Syrian community about specific topics like the legal procedures in issuing divorce and birth certificates. In her opinion, Syrian-led organizations have influential roles as they give her the opportunity to volunteer and share her knowledge with her community. At the same time, they offer a safe space for Syrians to gather.

2.2.3 Initiating Community Activities

The desk research for this study proves that Syrian-led organizations are part of the Syrian community in many countries of displacement. Moreover, it is the view of Ramadan (2019) that Syrian women are able to establish women-led organizations. I took the previous information into my consideration while I was conducting the fieldwork for this study, and I tried to look for any similar Syrian-led organizations that have been founded and operated in Cairo. The only two examples I found were ‘Souriat Association’ and ‘Wamdat Amal Organization,’ whose staff were mainly Syrian women, and their services targeted mainly Syrian women. Wamdat Amal was founded by a Syrian lady who chose one of the most vulnerable areas in the 6th of October city to open an office and support women there. The organization's focus was on women’s empowerment and children's education.

They collaborate with INGOs and SLOs that provide services to refugees in Egypt, like vocational training, psychosocial support, and legal awareness sessions. However, the organization's work declined after the co-founder got resettled to Canada. The other organization, i.e., Souriat Association, was founded earlier in 2013 by Syrian women activists who fled to Egypt after the outbreak of violence in Syria.

Ms. Reham is one of the co-founders of the Souriat Association in Cairo and is one of the few ladies I have met who have previous experience in volunteering and working with refugees in Syria. When she came to Egypt in 2012, she continued her active work to support the displaced Syrian community in Cairo with a group of activist Syrian women, and this was the core of Souriat. The voluntary team works remotely but actively to connect Syrians with work opportunities in addition to giving initial psychological support to Syrian women and their families. The team was working informally without registration at the Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS), and that deprived them of getting funds from international organizations that were interested in supporting their work. Therefore, they decided to accept an offer from the Arab Organization for Human Rights, a registered NGO at the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS), to work under their legal umbrella so as to have a unified executive board. Although this move opened the door for donors to fund the Souriat Association's activities and expanded their work and accessibility to the Syrian community, the male domination of the executive board under whose legal umbrella Souriat Association works deflected the original direction of the associations. According to Ms. Reham, over time, Souriat women's voices were marginalized by the men on the executive board. Consequently, Reham and the other female co-founder of the Souriat team voluntarily resigned from the Souriat Association.

As mentioned above, Ms. Reham has experience in voluntary work since she was in Syria. She used to work with the Danish Refugee Council in Syria to support the Iraqi refugees in 2008 and she was also involved in supporting Syrian nationals. Despite the fact that she was active in community work for years in Syria and she thought that her experience allowed her to know all the Syrian social classes, Ms. Reham expressed her surprise by the diversity of the Syrian social classes that she discovered when moving to Egypt. She put it as "*We thought that we cover all the classes with our activities and that we are reachable by anyone in Syria. I keep asking myself now, how come that we did not reach this class in Syria before displacement?*"

Similarly, Suhad Al Shami participated in community work in Syria before 2011. She told me that her first voluntary seeds were a result of being influenced by Amr Khalid's initiative Life Makers. With her friends, they try to implement some of the initiative's activities in the Syrian community. However, their activities did not continue for long as they were not registered with the government. It is worth mentioning that Suhad Al Shami got her higher education in Egypt in the 1990s, then she got back to Syria to get married there.

Both Reham and Suhad Al Shami are from Damascus, the capital, and they explained how they had access to civic engagement activities. Suhad Al Shami illustrated that this access was not equal for women from different social classes. This finding is in line with the finding of this research. Table (4) summarizes the answer to the following question "*What community activities were you engaged with in Syria?*"

Table (4)

What are the community activities that you were engaged with in Syria?	Religious (Quran) lessons	Engaged with Charity organizations	Volunteering or working with development organizations (IOs, INGOs or NGO)
Obour FGD (12 participants)	12	0	0
Haram FGD (9 participants)	9	2	0
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	5	2	3
	26	4	3

From the above table, it is clear that engagement of Syrian women in activities outside the home in Syria was mostly through attending religious lessons. 26 participants out of 34 attended these lessons, most of them were from the Obour area which as explained earlier is the area mostly inhabited by Syrians from rural conservative backgrounds. None of the participants from this area were engaged in charity or development. Attending religious classes and memorizing the Quran at mosques, brings to mind Sayed's article (2020) that tackles Al Qubaysiat, a political-Islamic group that the Syrian regime has used to cover the government's policy of the exclusion of Muslim Sunni from power. The group members were only women who were interested in learning about Islam, and no men were allowed to join this group. Al Jazeera Arabic (2021) explained how Al Qubaysiat used to work and offer their services within the Syrian community, attracting Syrian women to their public services and recruiting the elite in their higher ranks. Most of the participants in this study indicated that they attended this type of class. Suhad Al Shami, mentioned above as one of the middle-class women who initiated community activities in Egypt, was one of Al Qubaysiat's members.

As mentioned earlier, both Reham and Suhad Al Shami belonged to the middle class and were living in Syrian cities and, as such, were exposed to community work in Syria. In contrast, the rest of the participants come from rural areas where social activities were restricted.

Despite the involvement of middle-class women in community work in Syria, few of them, like Reham and Suhad, get involved in such work in Egypt. By contrast, the women in this study with lower education and low levels of voluntary experience in Syria showed a high level of involvement in volunteering with IOs, NGOs, INGOs, and SLOs or attending awareness sessions with them. Women who experienced this new experience in Egypt expressed their gratitude for having a safe space for them to gather in displacement. The main reasons that encouraged these women toward volunteering were proving themselves in displacement, testing their abilities and skills, being eager to move independently in the community, and proving that they can add value to their people in displacement. The result of having these spaces is empowering women and increasing their confidence. This finding is in line with a previous study conducted by Ramadan (2019), which declared that Syrians from rural areas became more exposed to the work and activities of civil society in displacement as compared to their daily-life routine in Syria prior to displacement. This is also supported by the findings of the desk research in Chapter Three, which illustrated the restrictions imposed by the Ba'ath government on civil society work.

It can be argued that the increased access of Syrian women to participate in supporting their society is attributed to the legal context in Egypt that opened the space for SLOs and INGOs to operate and offer services. Syria's political context did not allow any form of activism and restricted the operation of national and international entities outside the government's strict control.

This deprived the vast majority of Syrians of opening up to experience the context of volunteering or becoming active in civil society. Following the displacement to Egypt in 2011, Syrians who did not have previous knowledge about community services were intensively exposed to the IOs, NGOs and INGOs that were mainly targeting Syrian refugees. Women had chances to explore these spaces without being afraid of their Syrian community's judgment or criticism. As such, there has been an increase in women's accessibility to the public sphere upon arrival to Egypt. As presented in the study profile, most women come from rural areas but now live in urban settings in Egypt; therefore, they took advantage of living in a new context. Moreover, some of them took the initiative to evolve their experience from attending sessions to doing volunteering roles or creating Women Syrian-led organizations.

2.3 Engagement in paid work

Regardless of the fact that this study does not aim to intensively discuss Syrian women's involvement in paid work, many of the interviewees mentioned this topic and provided informative details about their experience. Thus, it was necessary to dedicate part of the analysis to paid work. 'Work' in this section refers to all types of paid work, whether formal or informal.

According to the fieldwork for this thesis, 22 out of the 34 women never worked in Syria. None of the Obour FGD women worked, nine of the Haram/Faysal group worked, and only three of the thirteen interviewed worked. The common types of work in Syria were teaching, nursing, and caregiving. etc. This is in line with the findings of a report by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in 2022 that highlighted that most women in Syria work in home-

based projects and traditional professions, like sewing or hairdressing, either based on their genuine wish or their unconditional acceptance of the society's structure that claims women's place is their home (OCHA, 2022).

Sparre (2008) argues that the Syrian government, since the 1970s, depended on giving women work opportunities in the public sector to secure economic growth. Women in the public sector were entitled to maternity leave and child care. However, with the economic changes in the country and the Islamic influence that started in the 1990s, the number of educated women who joined the public sector decreased. Jobs in sectors like teaching were more popular among women in Syria. For example, teaching gives women wider opportunities to work in public schools, support their families economically, and they can educate their children well. Moreover, continuing working in the public sector is limited because women in Syria cannot reach managerial positions as men do (Sparre, 2008).

Those who did not work in Syria managed to take this step in Egypt. Table 5 below summarizes the answer to the question, "*Do you work in Egypt?"*

Table (5)

Do you work in Egypt?	Yes	No	Work for the first time
Obour FGD (12 participants)	1	11	1
Haram FGD (9 participants)	7	2	4
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	13	0	7
Total: 34	21	12	12

The table above shows that 21 out of 34 women are involved in paid work in Egypt, and 12 out of the 21 worked for the first time in their lives. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Syrian men are the main breadwinner. However, the dire economic situation of Syrian families in Egypt and the increased demands of livelihood pushed women to participate in generating income. Most of these women confirmed that their incomes were considered a secondary source of income for their households. However, it is the primary source of income for divorced women as compared to married women or single women. Just like Egyptian women, Syrian women, whether educated or not, found their way to paid work, mainly in the informal sector (Rizk & Abou-Ali, 2013). Two of the participants work as teachers in Syrian community centers, two work as secretaries in clinics, five work in cooking and marketing their products online, and the remaining work with INGOs or SLOs with temporary contracts. These women, like Masa, Reem, and Sama, found in the Egyptian context wider opportunities to shine and rise in the public sphere.

However, not all women share the same experience in accessing the labor market. In Egypt, educated Syrian women cannot have work permits to practice their professions, like medicine, engineering, and journalism. Thus, in most cases, these women either remain unemployed and, therefore, deprived of chances to generate income or direct their efforts to the informal sector. Sama graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Arabic literature and has MA in Human Rights and Non-Violence Studies. She practiced journalism in Syria during the Syrian Revolution. Furthermore, she got anonymous threats to refrain from writing about the Syrian revolution in Syria and later in Egypt. She came to Egypt in 2012 and worked as a consultant journalist in one of the newspapers, the section that tackles the Syrian file.

However, after 2013 with the political changes in Egypt, she could not continue working in journalism without a work permit. After the divorce, Sama became responsible for her kids, so she decided to give online journalism courses. By the same token, Noor, who used to work as an engineer in Syria, couldn't find a work opportunity suitable for her in the formal market as she could not issue a work permit. This means that skillful professional women face obstacles to accessing the formal labor market in Egypt.

While most participants in the FGDs and in-depth interviews agreed that their engagement in the public sphere increased with displacement, Rawad, who arrived in Egypt in the last three months, had a different opinion. According to Rawad, women in Syria after 2011 started to be more visible in the public sphere compared to the situation prior to the crisis. Girls can now work in the informal sector to earn a living. She attributed that to the fact that most men left the country to escape military service, so female family members are left alone to generate income. Likewise, Reem, who has been in Egypt since 2013 but had the chance to visit Syria in 2018, agreed with Rawad's observation.

Reem indicated her surprise that young women with hijab are now working as waitresses at restaurants and cafes. She said that this type of job was unacceptable for women prior to the crisis. This observation by Reem and Rawad was also shared by many of the men who arrived recently to Egypt or visited Syria recently and were interviewed for this thesis. This observation raises an important and interesting question, which is the impact of the crisis on Syrian society. While this is outside the scope of this thesis, it drew my attention that it might be the crisis, not displacement, that impacts women's exposure to the public sphere.

To conclude, the dire economic conditions of the Syrian families in displacement made it difficult to depend only on men's income. Moreover, the increased accessibility of Syrian women to the public sphere in Egypt is inspired by the many Egyptian women who work in the informal sector. Over the past ten years, Syrian women started to gradually get involved in the informal work sector, so those who work encourage other women to take this step. The majority of them work for the first time in their lives. They reported how this step made them stronger and enabled them to participate in the decision-making within their families. This increased the venues of women's presence in the public sphere, with the exception of skillful Syrian women who faced difficulties in working in the formal sectors because of the work permit issues.

V. Chapter Five: Perception of the 'Self' and the 'Other'

The thesis attempted to give the women and men interviewed the space to evaluate and interpret their experiences and observations of the changes that happened to women's role in the Syrian community in Egypt. The first section of this chapter will present and evaluate how women perceive such changes, and the second section will present the perception of men.

1. The Perception of Women

Table (6) below summarizes the answer to the question, "*Do you think that displacement changed gender roles?*"

Table (6)

Do you think that displacement changed gender roles?	Yes	No
Obour FGD (12 participants)	12	0
Haram FGD (9 participants)	8	1
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	12	1
Total: 34	32	2

When the women's participants were asked if they recognized any changes in women's role in the Syrian community in displacement, 32 out of 34 indicated that there was a noticeable change. Most women agreed that they are witnessing an unprecedented increase in their accessibility to the public sphere that was previously mainly occupied by men. When asked about their perception of such change and whether it is positive or negative, the majority argued that they became stronger, more responsible, and more aware of their rights. With regard to working women, they positively commented on the fact that they became financially independent.

However, two of the participants perceived the increased responsibility as a burden. These two ladies came from the upper middle class, where they were used to having their cars and owning their commercial properties. They were totally convinced that women should not do men's tasks outside their homes, especially in displacement. They believe that women should be "queens" at their homes and that their trips outside their homes should be for entertainment only. Both ladies were against the idea of taking men's responsibilities outside homes, and one of them emphasized, "*I have to work to support my husband in the income. Also, I have to take the children to school and run their registration papers. Although this experience made me stronger, men's responsibilities decreased, and that's not a healthy habit*." Although she recognized the impact of involvement in the public sphere on her personality, she was unhappy about it and considered it a temporary situation that was imposed by the displacement and should be terminated once her husband got a job with a higher income.

As mentioned, however, most women participants acknowledge the importance of expanding their role in the public sphere compared to Syria, and they see it as an opportunity to personally grow and support their families. Those who have been in Egypt for more than ten years explained that at the beginning, they perceived these additional responsibilities as a burden and tiring type of work. Nonetheless, over time, they started to realize that these new responsibilities significantly contributed to the development of their personalities and understanding of the world outside their homes. Besides, through the discussions with the women participants in this study, they reported that two social factors affect their ability to become more responsible and stronger in Egypt. Firstly, the lack of family, social guardianship, and judgment in displacement encouraged women to go outside their homes without being afraid of getting criticized by their community.

Secondly, being influenced by Egyptian women who are more visible in the public sphere in the Egyptian society. It is not an overstatement to assert that Egyptian women influence Syrian women's changes in behavior and in their way of dressing. Syrian women who come from rural areas usually stick to choosing dark colors, wearing coats most of the time, and choosing white or black hair covers for their outfits outside their homes. Nonetheless, this has been subject to change in Egypt, as some women have started to wear more colorful headcovers, and those who work choose not to keep wearing the traditional coat.

The lack of social guardianship and judgment set the women free from the imposed social norms and gave them a chance to discover the outside world without fear. Totah (2013) highlights that the societal and cultural dominant perception in Syria was that women were first and foremost housewives, so they are associated mainly with the private sphere. Despite the fact that Syrians in Egypt get to know each other, they do not place a lot of emphasis to these networks as they did with their close relatives. Unlike the family network in Syria that restricts women's movement, women depend on the social network in Egypt to merely serve a few of the goals they want to reach in the public sphere.

Examples are expanding women's opportunities in navigating the public sphere, socializing and spending time with people from their own country, helping their kids to make friendships with other Syrian kids, and staying updated with the information concerning Syrians in Egypt. One of the ladies mentioned, "*My husband and I want to keep communicating with the Syrian community. So, our children get the chance to be with their Syrian colleagues*."

It was clear that most of the Syrian women in this study arrived in Egypt with their spouses, leaving behind the rest of the family networks and close relatives. Aya, a 55 Syrian woman, demonstrated that "*In Syria, there wasn't total freedom of movement for women because traditions and social norms were strongly in control of our movement. Here the presence of these norms is not as it was in Syria, which means that no one will know the family of the woman, so no one will judge her and tell her family if she breaks the social or traditional norms*". So according to Aya, Syrian women feel safe while discovering the public sphere in Egypt due to the lack of social judgment in displacement.

Huda and Masa came to Egypt with their husbands, but their extended families stayed in Syria. Both ladies came from a conservative area in rural Damascus and declared that in addition to the social judgment, they were suffering from the guardianship of their families in Syria as it limited their ability to move. As a result, this decreased their self-confidence over time because these restrictions made them feel untrusted and incapable of doing things outside their homes. The two ladies declared that before marriage, parents are responsible for their daughters' movements. After marriage, the husband is the one who carries this responsibility; as Masa puts it, "*In Syria, even when my husband is busy, my brother used to travel 5 km to accompany me from my home to the doctors. They made me feel that I don't have a mature identity to depend on myself. But, now, these things have changed, "Thanks to exile," I have become better able to move based on my need and as I wish*."

Masa was proud of the change she made in her life in Egypt. Similarly, Huda explained the change in the Syrian women's role in the community by saying, *"Syrian women became more responsible, and the tasks are more equally distributed between men and women in Egypt. Because women, even not by choice, discover their identity and capability. Also, we have to take into consideration that Egyptian women do work and participate in doing the home responsibilities like getting the grocery."* Huda was keen to demonstrate how the change in women's and men's roles in the Syrian community enhanced her self-confidence and made her think of the next move she wanted to make while discovering the public sphere.

Huda highlighted the idea of work and its importance in both Syrian and Egyptian communities. In the same vein, Tamara, who has a previous experience living in exile, remarked on the shift in women's role in displacement from being housewives and mothers to being active members of her family. She attributed this shift to the combination of increased economic needs for Syrian families and to being affected by the host community's culture where "working women" is a normal thing regardless of the economic needs. Tamara throws light on the fact that work was not a priority for Syrian women in Syria as it is in Egypt. She mentioned, "*In Egypt, Syrian women are led by the example of Egyptian women as they become better aware of their identities, abilities, and role in the community. Also, they see other Syrian women's success and are inspired by them*." As mentioned in Chapter Three, the history of the feminist movement in Egypt is well-developed, and it has an effect on Egyptian women. There are a variety of non-governmental organizations that work on the ground to raise women's awareness of their rights. This goes in parallel with the phase following the 2011 revolution that witnessed the development of various anti-harassment groups (Kamla, 2016).

In addition, Rizk and Abou-Ali (2013) mentioned that women's involvement in the informal labor market increased their visibility in the Egyptian public sphere. As such, Syrian women who came after 2011 were influenced directly by the role of Egyptian women. Moreover, international and non-governmental organizations played a vital role in raising Syrian women's awareness regarding their legal rights. According to Al-Monitor (2018), Syrian women have become better aware of their rights, how to defend themselves against sexual violence, and how to enhance their self-confidence.

Across this study, women keep referring to changes happening in their personalities. It is worth mentioning that in her study, *Refugee Identity and Coping: A Cultural Psychology*, Hala Mahmoud (2018) reveals that the redefinition of the self is a powerful coping mechanism for refugees. The process might happen in a positive or negative way; however, the positive way of self-redefinition involves focusing on a new empowering present identity, especially if one's social groups accept this change. By applying Mahmoud's argument, it can be argued that based on their new responsibilities, Syrian women built a new identity that is full of strength and pride. According to Mahmoud, social acceptance is a condition to formulate the redefinition of the new identity.

Table (7) below indicates their perception of whether the Syrian community in Egypt accepts or rejects such change.

Table (7)

From women's opinion, "Does the Syrian community in Egypt accept this change?"	Yes	Yes, because they have no other choice	No
Obour FGD (12 participants)	0	0	12
Haram FGD (9 participants)	0	7	2
Individual Interviews (13 participants)	7	5	1
Total: 34	7	12	15

The word 'change' in this question reflects both women's increased accessibility to the public sphere and women's character change. Basically, women in Obour, who are still living within an extended culture of Syria, could not see any sign of acceptance from their surroundings to the changes they as women recognize, and they wish to adopt if they have the chance. The majority of the other two groups agreed that the Syrian community in Egypt does accept these changes just because they have no other choice. These changes came as a result of the challenges Syrians faced in displacement and the need to survive in Egypt. For example, Ragad, who is a manager of a training center, explained that it was impossible to convince her husband to work in Syria while in Egypt, and due to the displacement circumstances, this mission became "not impossible." She said,

> *In Egypt, it was not easy for my husband to accept the new reality and see me going out for work. I started to volunteer at Watan events and then in the relief department. After that, I got the chance to be an employee. My husband did not know that I volunteered, and when he knew, he gave me hard times. However, my husband and I realized that we had to be more flexible and open-minded.*

Almost all the Syrian women participating in this study can easily recognize the change in their role in the Syrian family and the community, and they are proud of it. Their increased access to the public sphere was not expected nor went alongside the Syrian traditions and gender norms. In Syria, mostly in the rural areas, women mainly contributed to the private sphere with their role as mothers and housewives. There were not a variety of venues available for them to gather and socialize except in the family zone, where most of their discussions reinforced gender and traditional norms. In addition, women mentioned that they lacked self-confidence in Syria as the social guardianship restricted their mobility, overprotected women, and made them feel that they could not stand up for their rights and protect themselves when needed. While in Egypt, Syrian women have lived new experiences with the public sphere that affected their social and psychological lives. Basically, the dire economic needs pushed women to increase their access to public services and pushed men to accept this. Also, the IOs, INGOs, NGOs, and SLOs that targeted women with their services expanded the horizon for women to gather and get exposed to new experiences and thoughts.

2. The Perception of Men

This section will present and analyze the findings of the in-depth interviews with men. The first part of this section briefly highlights the profile of the men who participated in this study. The remainder of the section will tackle their observations regarding women's accessibility to the public sphere and discuss their opinions regarding the shift in gender roles between men and women following displacement.

2.1 The Profile of the Men Participating in the Study

The male participants were between the ages of 20 and 50, and they came from different Syrian governorates, like Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Daraa. The majority came from cities and lived in Egyptian neighborhoods, like the 6th of October and Obour City. Although the numbers of men and women participants in this study are not equal, the researcher noticed that the percentage of men with higher education in the group is higher as compared to women. Unlike women, where some of them had elementary education, the lowest school education for men was secondary level. None of them were illiterate, unlike the women's groups, which included four illiterate women. Regarding their legal status, they are all registered with the UNHCR, and two of them only have residency on their passports. Syrian men with passports must renew them every two years, which is the maximum validity period for Syrian passport holders. The cost of renewing the passport is 300 USD. Five out of seven are married and have children; two are single, one is responsible for his family, and the other is a student and depends on his father's income. Six out of seven men work in Egypt in the informal sector, and they are the main source of income for their families and the last one is a student and depends on his family.

2.2 Men's Perception of Women's Increased Involvement in the Public Sphere

Six of the interviewed men confirmed that Syrian women became more involved in the public sphere upon living in Egypt. Only one man believed otherwise. This man came to Egypt in 2021, and his wife followed him in 2023. As such, she is a new arrival, and her stay in Egypt is too short to assess any change. Moreover, his wife was a graduate student who used to work with

an international organization that operates in Syria to provide services to internally displaced people.

When asked about the reason behind the increased involvement of women in public life, most men declared that women psychologically suffered in the first years of displacement as they missed their families. To help them get over this negative feeling, they allowed them to go out and socialize with other Syrian women. As such, the answer provided by men reveals a sense of superiority and confirms the continuity of patriarchal norms. The men in the interviews stressed the fact that they allowed this change to happen, confirming that the increased involvement of women in public activities is because of their support.

When asked if such involvement led to any change and their perception of such change, the majority proclaimed that Syrian women in displacement become more mature and responsible. Taking over additional responsibilities, having more freedom of movement, and trying to build networks to replace the lack of family connections led to positive changes in their characters. Below are some of the quotes by men indicating their positive perception of how Syrian women were able to overcome the hardships of displacement and the positive impact it had on their characters. "*They do not almost exist in the public life in Syria, and they lack social and communication skills. However, women were able to learn these skills*." Another man explained, "*In the first few years in Egypt, women were so nostalgic and suffered from the lack of a social network, but as time passed, they managed to build new connections, mostly with Syrians and navigate the Egyptian context.*"

2.2.1 Dealing with the Bureaucracy

For men, the increased access of women to the public sphere was needed to help them get over their psychological distress and the need to build social networks and integrate with the host community. The loss of family networks for men was perceived negatively and was the reason behind the psychological distress of women. However, for women, and as discussed in the previous chapter and the beginning of this chapter, the lack of family networks released women from being afraid and of being judged. As such, men regarded the lack of family networks in Egypt as a source of weakness for women, while women perceived it as a source of strength for them.

All men agreed that in Egypt, Syrian women are no longer only housewives and mothers. When asked what are the additional responsibilities that women are undertaking in Egypt as compared to Syria, the men were not able to list the tasks that women were doing on their behalf in displacement. Rather than explaining the responsibilities that are delegated to women (renewing residency, paying school fees, dealing with IOs, NGOs, INGOs), they mainly talked about the increased involvement of women in social activities with other Syrian women. When directly asked about the above-mentioned responsibilities that the women in the sample confirmed that they took over, one of the participants, Ayham, stated: "*When women become responsible for these things (doing the official papers, getting services done, getting the grocery, etc.), it is the fault of their male family members; it is a shame indeed."* Some men, especially older ones, indicated their dissatisfaction with women's increased visibility in the public sphere. They also mentioned that this increments negatively affect women's role in the private sphere so that women give less priorities to their tasks at home. They recognized it as a sign of their "weakness" in light of the hardships Syrians were experiencing in displacement.

As Suerbaum (2018) highlighted that in the Syrian tradition, men were always in the "strong" position, and women were in the "weak" position. As such, men's sense of masculinity is strongly linked to their ability to maintain their responsibilities in the public sphere. This idea is also reflected in Yassen's quote, "*Women's over visibility outside her home for things men can do is a sign of incomplete masculinity of the male family members*."

2.2.2 Volunteering and Civic Engagement

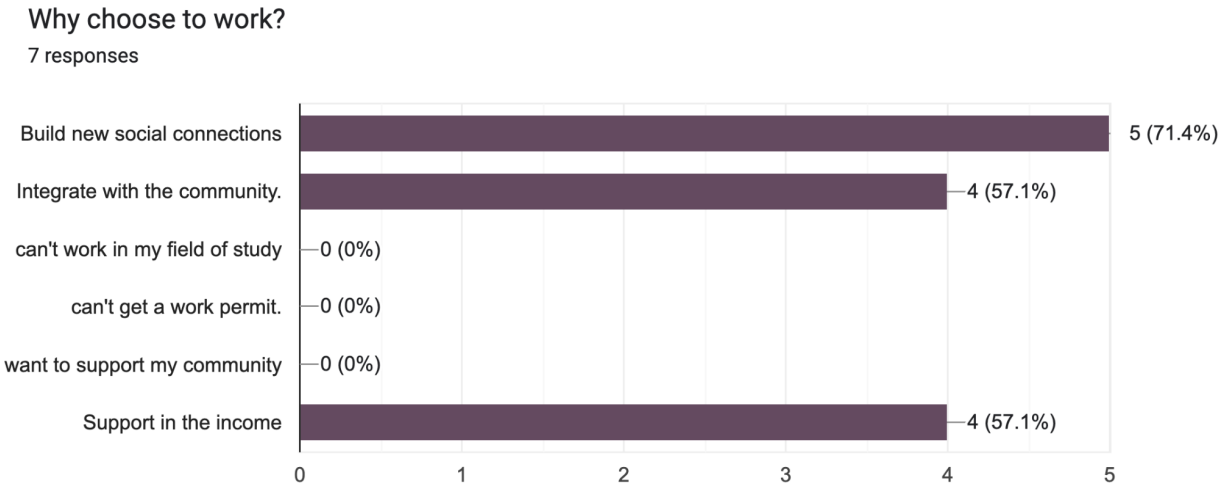
Unlike dealing with the bureaucracy, most of the men perceived volunteering and civic engagement in a more positive manner. Five out of the seven men (the younger men) who participated in the interviews are engaged in volunteering activities in Egypt. The other two older participants indicated that they allowed their daughters to volunteer and explore this experience in Egypt. However, all the men agreed that they only allow their females in the families to volunteer and engage in community work if they trust the places where women want to volunteer with. When asked about the meaning of "trusted places," they said they mean a place where they know and trust the people who work there and the legal status of the place in order to ensure safety. When asked why they think the engagement of women in volunteering activities is good, they again stressed the importance of building a strong social network with the Syrian community and taking the opportunity to support Syrians in Egypt. Moreover, they also referred to the importance of integration with the host community. For instance, Kareem mentioned that he encouraged his sisters to volunteer for activities targeting vulnerable people. He asserts that it is important for women to be active and strong and to improve their social skills by interacting with the community around them.

Sami indicates, "*Women are eager to prove their existence and improve their skills and are full of energy. Also, they are pioneers in responding to volunteering opportunities more than men do*."

As mentioned in the previous chapter, newly comers to Egypt commented on the fact that Syrian society is undergoing change. They mentioned how more and more young Syrian women are working in sectors that were previously restricted to women, like cafes and restaurants. Likewise, the men who newly arrived in Egypt commented on the increased involvement of women in volunteering with community organizations in Syria which is new in the context of Syria as civic engagement in general and for women, in particular, was greatly restricted, as explained in chapter three of this thesis. For example, Kareem, who recently arrived from Homs, talked about the charity work and NGOs that are operating in Homs after the crisis to support the internally displaced Syrians, arguing that some Syrian girls are participating in these initiatives. Likewise, Yassen, who left Syria in 2016, and Majd, who left Syria in 2020, emphasized that women started to participate in voluntary activities with IOs and INGOs that started to operate in Syria after 2011. This points to the question I raised earlier on whether it is 'displacement' or the 'crisis' itself that increased the involvement of women in public life. This thesis is mostly based on interviews and FGDs with women and men who came to Egypt in 2011 and 2013. The newcomers represent a small minority of the sample. It is interesting to compare the findings of this thesis with new research that can be undertaken with the newcomers to understand how the Syrian society has changed and whether the development of the crisis is the reason for the change.

2.2.3 Paid jobs

While Syrian men are the main breadwinner in Egypt, as indicated by the interviews with both men and women, most men (six out of seven) in the men's interviews indicated that the women in their families (wives, sisters, and daughters) are working in Egypt. The chart below indicates the reasons that the men gave for the engagement of women in paid work.



The main reason given by men, according to the above chart, is to build social networks. The second reason indicated is the need to integrate into the host society; the third is to support the family income. As such, although the men did not ignore the financial need that pushed women to work, they placed the need to socialize as the main reason for women's work. For example, Sami's mother started her journey in Egypt with severe depression because she left her parents in Syria. Over time, her husband and children encouraged her to build a social network in her neighborhood. Moreover, her Egyptian neighbor encouraged her to get outside her home and connect with Syrian friends. After a while, she became better psychologically and expanded her social network. Owing to this, she got a job offer, working as a teacher, then enhanced her skills and got another job as a dental assistant. Sami's mother is now supporting her family and her mother in Syria.

All these developments happened despite the fact that Sami's mother did not have work experience in Syria. Though this was a surprise for her son, it made him proud. At the same time, Sami was so concerned about his sister's thoughts regarding finding a job in Egypt. He said that his sister is still young and does not have the social experience to deal with the world outside the home. One of my observations throughout the interviews with men is that men as "Brothers or fathers" are more conservative and controlling of women's mobility than 'husbands' or 'sons.'

Through the interviews with men and women, the researcher was able to understand the working opportunities for Syrian women in Egypt. They are mainly located in the informal sector as teachers in educational centers, nurses at clinics, and paid volunteers at INGOs and Syrian-led organizations. Usually, this type of work is marked by long hours, no regular vacations, low income, and being unstable. Kareem and Yaseen agreed that the work opportunities available for women in displacement are miserable and inhumane. They believe that women deserve a better life and better work opportunities. Yaseen considered working in the informal sector for Syrian women as a "*modern slavery*" where they have to work for long hours, get along with huge stress, and travel long distances just to get poor salaries at the end of the month. Likewise, Karame stated, "*I am against women doing hard jobs or working long hours; it is just 'Bahdala' 'poor and stressful work conditions.' Actually, women deserve to be more comfortable*." Anas, whose wife is an engineer and she used to work back in Syria, elaborated that his wife cannot find employment opportunities in her profession in the formal sector, and working in the informal sector is not an option for both of them. He said that when they have kids, the priority shifts from working to caring for them. Yaseen mentioned that work in displacement is imposed on women, and it became acceptable, while in Syria, it is not imposed and not acceptable.

However, again men stressed the fact that the economic situation in Syria is getting worse, and now women are working in areas that previously were restricted to men. Yaseen mentioned that when he was in Syria in 2016, he saw women in Damascus working as cargo handlers. This type of work was mainly for men, but because of the dire economic situation in Syria after the crisis, women accepted to take it to generate money.

2.2 4 Overall Perception Regarding Changes in Women's Role:

Almost all the men admit the change in women's role in the community. They describe this change with mainly positive words relating to women's personalities, like becoming more mature, stronger, and more responsible. However, some of them also asserted that this change negatively affected women's role at home. All of the men in the interviews glorified the motherhood role of women and that this role should be a priority for any woman. Any change women adopted in displacement should be added to this role but not to replace it. Although they appreciated women's participation in generating income, what I noticed is that they accept it now, but men wish that they could cover all the needs of their female partners so that females have the choice to work or not. They were not happy with the obligations imposed by displacement on Syrian families. All of them mentioned that one of their concerns regarding the high exposure of women to the public sphere is the risk of harassment, lack of security, and being abused in the informal market. For instance, one of the participants mentioned that he encouraged his sister to participate in all the activities of the public sphere; nonetheless, he wished she would have the chance to choose this, not to be imposed on her because of the harsh circumstances in displacement.

For men, women were not prepared to access either the labor market or the public sphere, and it is the responsibility of the state to provide a safe environment to ensure women's safety. When asking men whether they want women to keep these changes in their personal lives if they go back to Syria, only three supported the idea as they considered the skills that the women got in displacement are needed to rebuild Syria, while the other four men considered these changes as a temporary situation that is subject to change if the situation in Syria changed.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, six of the seven participants confirmed the increase in women's involvement in the public sphere, but one of the participants thought otherwise. Also, as mentioned earlier, this man who arrived in Egypt in 2020 called Majd. He argues that women's accessibility to the public sphere has actually decreased with the move to Egypt. However, it must be noted that he is in Obour City, where most of the Syrian community there is conservative. He said, "*Women in Syria were having big roles such as work, study, doing hobbies, volunteering; however, here in Egypt, most of these things disappear*." His wife used to work and volunteer with NGOs, IOs, and INGOs in Syria, as many INGOs operated in Syria and implemented projects to support the internally displaced Syrians. With the increased departure of men to escape the military services, opportunities for women to volunteer and work with these INGOs or SLOs increased. He elaborates saying

> "*Maybe this type of volunteering and working opportunities with INGOs or SLOs is not in Obour because of the lack of a social network and security which made families worry about the mobility of their female members. Also, because Obour is remote and Syrians stick to their traditions, they are not open to mingling with the Egyptian context."*

As such, Majd contributes the lack of engagement in the public sphere for women in Obour to the geographical location of the city that made it a remote area for INGOs and SLOs to reach compared to the other Cairo neighborhoods. In addition, He shed light on the conservative Syrian community in Obour that is still keeping the Syrian traditions that do not encourage women to be present in the public sphere. Besides, Majd noticed also that the Syrian community there is not integrated with the Egyptian society compared to other areas.

Throughout all the questions about women's participation in the public sphere, like volunteering and job opportunities, there was a question about who made the final decision regarding these activities. Most of the answers were either both men and women or only men. However, neither the men nor the women indicated that women take this decision alone. All agreed that women have their opinions, but the final decisions should still be made by men. The responses by men reflect how they see themselves as protectors of their females and the spokesperson for the community. This perception of men of their roles highlights that gender norms would not necessarily change with changing gender roles. This relates to the article by Pessar (2001) mentioned in the literature review of this thesis. Pessar studied the situation of displaced Guatemalan women who were empowered with displacement but faced challenges to maintain this power manifested in the changes in gender roles upon returning to their homeland. In other words, displacement gave them agency to identify their own interest; however, this change faced social rejection when they returned to the Guatemalan nation-state when Guatemalan men insisted on confirming their patriarchal role where only men make decisions in the community (Pessar, 2001). Accordingly, it is a possibility that Syrian women will face the same challenges upon returning to Syria.

However, when the researcher discussed this idea with some of the male participants, they referred to the importance of taking into consideration the changes that occurred in the Syrian community and the shift in men's and women's roles in Syria after the crisis. The newcomers' opinion refers to the fact that the Syrian community in Syria is under ongoing change similar to the change happening in displacement in terms of men's and women's roles in the community.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

What encouraged conducting this study is the lack of literature on Syrian women's opinions regarding their exposure to the public sphere following their move to Egypt. The findings of this thesis suggest that the existence of Syrian-led organizations, among other service providers, encouraged Syrian women to expand their access to activities outside their homes. Besides, the move to Egypt led to a shift in gender roles where women started to bear some of the responsibilities that were traditionally assigned to men in Syria.

Using the intersectionality approach that emphasizes the importance of addressing social categories from different angles, this thesis argues that macro and micro factors intersect together to shape the experience of both men and women in displacement. The macro factors include the host countries' social, economic, political, and legal context. Chapter Three of this thesis compared the situation of women in both Syria and Egypt, analyzing the development of the women's movements in both countries. Despite the similarity, two macro differences can be found between Egypt and Syria. The first has to do with the space allocated to civil society, and the second has to do with the economic and political developments in the two countries. Since 1971, the Ba'ath party has dominated Syria's political landscape, completely controlling and limiting the space for civil society. While this was the case in Egypt during Nasser's rule, the civil society space widened with the transformation of Egypt's economy to the capitalist model. With the beginning of the 1990s and the proliferation of international organizations following the hosting of the ICPD, women's organizations flourished in Egypt. With the Syrian conflict and the displacement of Syrians in countries of the region, including Egypt, the number of NGOs, INGOs, and SLOs providing services to Syrian refugees has increased. These organizations provided spaces for

Syrian women to attend awareness sessions, volunteer to help other Syrians, and even provide them with ideas to initiate activities to help the displaced Syrians.

While these macro differences allowed Syrian women to be present in the public sphere in Egypt, the extent of such presence is not the same for all Syrian women. The difference in the degree of such presence is attributed to the micro factors. The micro factors refer to women's individual characteristics, education level, social class, and geographical background, among other variables. These variables intersect with each other to result in a variety of experiences with regard to women's engagement in public sphere activities. As explained in chapter four, more than half of the women participants (Twenty-five participants) came from rural areas, and the remaining ten were living in cities in Syria. In Egypt, all of them moved to cities, mainly 6th of October, Nasr City, Obour City, and Haram. The exposure to the city meant a higher level of exposure to the public sphere. However, as explained in Chapter Four, the exposure of the participants in Obour city to the public sphere was less as compared to the other areas. This is attributed to the fact that Obour city is a remote area away from the services of civil society organizations.

Moreover, and as explained earlier, Syrians residing in this city are the most conservative who continue to adhere to their tradition. Despite that, even in the Obour area, there was variation where older married women displayed more flexibility in terms of access to the public sphere as compared to younger married women. This indicates the importance of applying the intersectionality approach as age, as well as other variables, could explain how the experience would differ from one individual to the other.

Despite the different levels of involvement with the public sphere, most women participating in this research, regardless of their age, resident area, and educational and social backgrounds, pinpointed that such involvement increased with their move to Egypt as compared to Syria. This is especially with regard to dealing with the bureaucracy in terms of renewing residency permits or paying bills, etc. As most of the men who are the main breadwinners work in the informal sector for long hours with no leave system, they cannot maintain all their responsibilities in the public sphere as they used to do in Syria. Therefore, women took over these responsibilities to save the family's main income from any deductions. These findings also apply to the Obour group, where most of the women participants belong to a lower educational background than the rest of this study's participants.

With regard to engagement in paid work, the thesis highlighted that many Syrian women with primary and secondary education started to work in Egypt even though they never worked in Syria. The reasons are attributed to the higher living expenses in Egypt, the huge informal sector, and their inspiration by the Egyptian women who were perceived as economically active. The involvement of these Syrian women in paid work came as a secondary source for their families' income, except for divorced women, who provided the main source of income for their families. The situation is different with regard to highly educated women. In Syria, highly educated women mostly worked in the public sector, where they were entitled to maternity and childcare leaves. These women were unable to find work in Egypt because of the difficulty of securing a work permit. Given their educational background, they would not accept working in the informal sector.

The thesis pinpointed to the observation made by Syrians who arrived in Egypt recently or visited Syria recently. They observed that after 2011, women started to be more visible in public spaces in Syria and in the informal market. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this observation questions whether it is the crisis or the displacement that changed gender norms and increased women's involvement in the public sphere.

Almost all women who participated in this study perceived their increased access to the public sphere positively. They highlighted that such exposure raised their self-esteem and allowed them to value their contributions to their community. They also commented that it changed their role in the family as they reported that the exposure to the public sphere improved their ability to participate in the decision-making within their families and made them stronger over the years.

All of the men participants also agreed that there was a noticeable change in women's role in the community and that their presence in the public sphere increased in displacement. They commented on the positive development in their women's personalities, describing them as more mature, responsible, and stronger than how they were in Syria. Interestingly, however, they stressed that they are the ones who allowed their participation in the public sphere. And that they allowed that out of the realization that displacement led to their psychological stress and that they needed such engagement to build a social network to fill the gap of missing family members. Such a narrative by the men highlights their need to stress superiority and the fact that they are in control by highlighting that they allowed this change to happen. Their narrative also pinpoints to the fact that that gender norms have not changed even though gender roles have changed.

It is also interesting to note, as explained in the previous chapter, that while women believed that displacement freed them from the social judgment of family members and is the reason that encouraged them to explore the public sphere, men believed the opposite. Men argued that the lack of a family network created psychological stress and that engagement in public activities was the way to create a new network to get over such stress.

Despite the fact that women in Arab countries scored the lowest participation in the public sphere according to international standards, the Syrian women's experience in Egypt, as highlighted in this thesis, indicates that the engagement of Syrian women in the public sphere increased with displacement to another Arab country. This indicates the importance of not viewing the Arab world as one category but rather appreciating the fact that the experience of women would differ from one country to the other as the political, economic, social, and legal contexts differ from one Arab country to another. Syrian women smartly benefit from the political and economic cracks that have emerged since 2011 to bloom in displacement despite all the obstacles they went through. Syrian women in Egypt managed to introduce themselves as valuable members of the Syrian community through their unexpected presence in the public sphere. In Syria, they were limited to private space, but they proved that they could be an effective member of the public sphere in displacement.

An increased level of participation in the public sphere in Egypt is evident among the Syrian women who participated in this research. It is crystal clear that women bloom whenever they find an opportunity. Living in displacement gave women the chance to investigate new opportunities that were not available in their home country. Based on the findings of this research and the positive role played by SLOs, this thesis recommends encouraging the initiation and expansion of women-led organizations in the remote areas of Egypt that are deprived of these

organizations. Awareness-raising sessions and workshops tailored to improve women's skills, especially those with low education levels, could be implemented. Despite the difficult working conditions in the informal sector, this thesis demonstrates that many Syrian women with primary and secondary education, like Egyptian women, were able to find economic opportunities in this sector. As such, this thesis also recommends improving the working conditions in the informal market. Last but not least, this thesis also calls upon Arab governments to pay attention to young girls and encourage their participation in civic engagement activities throughout their education process and to seriously include women in decision-making roles at all levels. In terms of future research, this thesis hopes that researchers would investigate the social changes happening in Syria to understand whether the changes as a result of the conflict that erupted in 2011 or the experience of displacement is the reason behind the increased access of Syrian women to the public sphere.

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Appendix A: IRP Approval

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Case# 2022-2023-098

To: Ola Al Daieh
Maysa Ayoub
Eman Moursy

From: Heba Kotb Chair of the IRB
Date 12/1/2023

Re: IRB approval

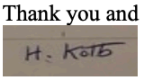
This is to inform you that I reviewed your revised research proposal entitled

"Displacement and Civic Engagement the Case of Syrian Women in Egypt after 2011"

It required consultation with the IRB under the "expedited" category. As you are aware, there were minor revisions to the original proposal, but your new version addresses these concerns successfully. Your proposal used appropriate procedures to minimize risks to human subjects and that adequate provision was made for confidentiality and data anonymity of participants in any published record. I believe you will also make adequate provision for obtaining informed consent of the participants.
This approval letter was issued under the assumption that you have not started data collection for your research project. Any data collected before receiving this letter could not be used since this is a violation of the IRB policy.

Please note that IRB approval does not automatically ensure approval by CAPMAS, an Egyptian government agency responsible for approving some types of off-campus research. CAPMAS issues are handled at AUC by the office of the University Counsellor. The IRB is not in a position to offer any opinion on CAPMAS issues, and takes no responsibility for obtaining CAPMAS approval.
This approval is valid for only one year. In case you have not finished data collection within a year, you need to apply for an extension.

Thank you and good luck.



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Appendix B: Interview with Women

A. Demographic questions:

- Name:
- Age:
- Education:
- Marital status:
- If married: Is the husband in Egypt? If not, where is the husband?
- If married/divorced/widowed: Do you have children? How many children? Age of children

B. Social class

- Do you work? If yes, what kind of work? If she does not work, what is your source of income?
- If married, does the husband work? What kind of work? If not, what is his source of income?
- If there are adult children? Do they work? What kind of work? If not, do they go to university? Which university? If younger children? Do they go to school? Which school?
- In which area do you live in Egypt?
- Are you registered with UNHCR?
- Do you take financial assistance from UNHCR?
- Have you lived in other countries before coming to Egypt? If yes, elaborate.

C. In Egypt:

- How long have you been in Egypt?
- Why have you chosen to come to Egypt?
- From which part of Syria do you come from? Have you moved to other parts of Syria before coming to Egypt? If yes, elaborate
- How do you find your life in Egypt as compared to Syria, particularly with regard to the following:
    - Freedom of movement
    - Decision making
    - Active involvement in community work
- In general, how do you think the displacement experience (living in another country) has affected you on a personal and professional level? Please elaborate as much as possible.
- What are the types of engagement in the public sphere for Syrian women in Cairo?
- What kind of community activities are you engaged in? Please provide details as much as possible.
- Since when have you been involved in community activities? And what promoted your involvement in such activities?

D. Engagement in the Public Sphere in Cairo

- Do you engage in any public sphere activity in Egypt? What kind of activities? Please provide details as much as possible.
- What are the types of engagement in the public sphere for Syrian women in Cairo?
- Have you noticed changes in Syrian women's role in the community? Elaborate?
    - Are these changes accepted in the community? And why?
    - How
- In your opinion what is the role of the RLOSs, the IOs, NGOs, INGOs, or the host community in supporting Syrian women to have an effective role in the community?
- What are the INGOs that you know? How do you evaluate their activities which target women?
- Have you participated in I RLOSs, IOs, NGOs, or NGO's activities? Have you volunteered with them?
- Have you participated in Syrian RLOs activities? Have you worked with them?
- Since when have you been involved in community activities? And what promoted your involvement in such activities?

E. In Syria

- Were you also engaged in community activities in Syria? If yes, what kind of activities?
- If not, why have you not engaged in any community work in Syria? And why did this change when you came to Egypt?
- How do you evaluate your engagement in community activities in Syria as compared to your community work in Egypt? Do we use to have similar activities to what we have in Egypt?
- In your opinion, What are the types of engagement in the public sphere available for Syrian women in Syria?
- If there is a change in your life, and you have the chance to go back to Syria, do you prefer to keep the changes you get in exile? If yes, why? If not, why?

Appendix C: Interview with Men

A. Demographic questions

- Name:
- Age:
- Education:

- From which part of Syria do you come? Have you moved to other parts of Syria before coming to Egypt? If yes, elaborate.
- Are you married? If yes, do you have children? If yes, how many children and how did you come to Egypt: Did you come alone and then your wife and children followed or you came together?

- Have you lived in other countries before coming to Egypt? If yes, elaborate by explaining if your wife and children were with you or not
- Why have you chosen to come to Egypt?
- Which area do you live in, Egypt?

- Are you registered with UNHCR?
- Do you take financial assistance from UNHCR?
- Do you work? If yes, what kind of work? If he does not work, what is your source of income?
- Does your wife work? What kind of work? Did your wife also work when she was in Syria?
- Which university? If younger children? Do they go to school? Which school?

B. In Egypt:

1. **Social class**

- In general, how do you think the displacement experience (living in another country) has affected women on a personal and professional level? Please elaborate as much as possible.
    - Personal:
    - Family:
    - Professional:

2. **Change in women's role:**

- Have you noticed changes in Syrian women's role in the community? Elaborate?
- Are these changes accepted in the community? And why?

- How do you find women's life in Egypt as compared to Syria, particularly with regard to the following:
    - Freedom of movement:
    - Decision making:
    - Active involvement in community work

C. Engagement in the Public Sphere Cairo

- What are the types of engagement in the public sphere for Syrian women in Cairo, compared to Syria?
- Do you engage in any community activity in Egypt? What kind of activities? Please provide details as much as possible.
    - If they participate in community activities, in your opinion, what is the role of the RLOSs, the IOs, NGOs, INGOs, or the host community in supporting Syrian women to have an effective role in the community?

D. In Syria

- In your opinion, What are the types of engagement in the public sphere available for Syrian women in Syria?
- Why haven't some women not engaged in any community work in Syria? And why did this change when you came to Egypt?
- If there is a change in women's role in the community in Egypt, and you have the chance to go back to Syria, do you prefer or advocate keeping this change? If yes, why? If not, why?

Appendix D: Focus Group Discussion with Women

A. Demographic questions:

- Name:
- Age:
- Education:
- Marital status:
- If married: Is the husband in Egypt? If not, where is the husband?
- If married/divorced/widowed: Do you have children? How many children? Age of children

B. Social class

- Do you work? If yes, what kind of work? If she does not work, what is your source of income?
- If married, does the husband work? What kind of work? If not, what is his source of income?
- If there are adult children? Do they work? What kind of work? If not, do they go to university? Which university? If younger children? Do they go to school? Which school?
- In which area do you live in Egypt?
- Are you registered with UNHCR?
- Do you take financial assistance from UNHCR?
- Have you lived in other countries before coming to Egypt? If yes, elaborate.

C. In Egypt:

- How long have you been in Egypt?
- Why have you chosen to come to Egypt?
- From which part of Syria do you come from? Have you moved to other parts of Syria before coming to Egypt? If yes, elaborate
- How do you find your life in Egypt as compared to Syria, particularly with regard to the following:
    - Freedom of movement
    - Decision making
    - Active involvement in community work
- In general, how do you think the displacement experience (living in another country) has affected you on a personal and professional level? Please elaborate as much as possible.
- What are the types of engagement in the public sphere for Syrian women in Cairo?
- What kind of community activities are you engaged in? Please provide details as much as possible.
- Since when have you been involved in community activities? And what promoted your involvement in such activities?

D. Engagement in the Public Sphere in Cairo

- Do you engage in any public sphere activity in Egypt? What kind of activities? Please provide details as much as possible.
- What are the types of engagement in the public sphere for Syrian women in Cairo?
- Have you noticed changes in Syrian women's role in the community? Elaborate?
    - Are these changes accepted in the community? And why?
    - How
- In your opinion what is the role of the RLOSs, the IOs, NGOs, INGOs, or the host community in supporting Syrian women to have an effective role in the community?
- What are the INGOs that you know? How do you evaluate their activities which target women?
- Have you participated in I RLOSs, IOs, NGOs, or NGO's activities? Have you volunteered with them?
- Have you participated in Syrian RLOs activities? Have you worked with them?
- Since when have you been involved in community activities? And what promoted your involvement in such activities?

E. In Syria

- Were you also engaged in community activities in Syria? If yes, what kind of activities?
- If not, why have you not engaged in any community work in Syria? And why did this change when you came to Egypt?
- How do you evaluate your engagement in community activities in Syria as compared to your community work in Egypt? Do we use to have similar activities to what we have in Egypt?
- In your opinion, What are the types of engagement in the public sphere available for Syrian women in Syria?
- If there is a change in your life, and you have the chance to go back to Syria, do you prefer to keep the changes you get in exile? If yes, why? If not, why?