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**The American
University in Cairo**

School of Global Affairs
and Public Policy

Center for Migration and Refugee
Studies



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THE ARAB SPRING AND MIGRATION IN EGYPT, ONE YEAR ON: IMPACTS, PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES

By Hend Hafez

Assisted by Ayman Ghaly



The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS)

The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) is an interdisciplinary center of the American University in Cairo (AUC). Situated at the heart of the Middle East and North Africa, it aims at furthering the scientific knowledge of the large, long-standing and more recent, refugee and migration movements witnessed in this region. But it also is concerned with questions of refugees and migration in the international system as a whole, both at the theoretical and practical levels.

CMRS functions include instruction, research, training and outreach. It offers a Master of Arts in migration and refugee studies and a graduate diploma in forced migration and refugee studies working with other AUC departments to offer diversified courses to its students. Its research bears on issues of interest to the region and beyond. In carrying it out, it collaborates with reputable regional and international academic institutions. The training activities CMRS organizes are attended by researchers, policy makers, bureaucrats and civil society activists from a great number of countries. It also provides tailor-made training programs on demand. CMRS outreach involves working with its environment, disseminating knowledge and sensitization to refugee and migration issues. It also provides services to the refugee community in Cairo and transfers its expertise in this respect to other international institutions.

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) or the American University in Cairo.



Preface

Studying the effects of the vast political changes the Arab world has witnessed since January 2011 on migration in the region is a subject worthy of particular attention. Yet, it is difficult to undertake research on actual flows or possible future within, originating in or arriving in the region due to the unavailability of reliable information. To make up for this information gap, the Migration Policy Centre (MPC) of the European University Institute (EUI) has partnered with CMRS to support a first attempt at understanding the migration dynamics and potential in Egypt specifically since February 2011. The fruit of this joint effort is this paper on The Effects of the Arab Spring on Migration Flows in Egypt, which covers the period until April 2012.

The author, Henda Hafez, has chosen to split up the study into three sections. The first reviews migration and refugee flows into Egypt and the developments in Egyptian immigration policy during that period. The second section examines emigration issues deriving from the revolutionary changes that Egypt experienced. The third section reproduces field research undertaken specifically for this study. It reviews findings of two focus group discussions, primary information obtained in interviews and an examination of migration issues in programs of several political parties and of presidential candidates in the presidential elections. It is noteworthy that research was carried out at a time Egypt was preparing for its first truly competitive presidential elections.

The interviewees the author talked to include representatives from the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Office (UNHCR) in Cairo and the Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA). The author also met with experts, academics, political activists, political party founding members and analysts. Not surprisingly, most of the interviewees initially had not considered migration issues among their top priorities, given the current political turmoil. However, as the interviews proceeded, each considered them an important aspect for their programs, which needed to be developed. The most notable common denominator identified across the board is the need to improve skills and education in order to make Egyptians more employable and/or competitive in the job market, both domestically and in the international arena. Protection of Egyptian migrants also was a top concern for the interviewees.

The two focus groups consisted of young Egyptian adults. One group was composed of highly educated graduates and the second unemployed highly skilled young graduates. The discussions centered on migration intentions in relation to recent events in Egypt. Attendees in both sessions identified a shift in their expectations between the few months following February 2011 and the time of the focus group discussions, in spring 2012.

The revolutionary changes that Egypt has witnessed have given rise to both hope and fear. Everyone that was interviewed for this study believed in an enormous potential of the country in the long run. However they all agreed that the current situation and the upcoming years are a challenge. Even though the politicians, both presidential candidates and political party figures, had not thought of migration as a top priority in their respective programs, their reactions and statements in the interviews reveal that it will become one in the near future.

CMRS hopes that this introduction to trying to analyze the effects of the revolutionary changes in Egypt on migration is a start to more extensive studies as information on the subject is progressively generated . CMRS intends to continue exploring the subject, in the context of its coverage of Egyptian migration policy.



Dr. Ibrahim Awad, PhD.
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Table of Contents

PREFACE	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
IMMIGRATION POLICY IN EGYPT AFTER THE ARAB SPRING	2
SALLOUM CAMP	3
LOCAL PRECEPTIONS OF FOREIGNERS AFTER THE REVOLUTION	6
EMIGRATION ISSUES POST EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION	7
RETURNEES	8
SKILLS AND EDUCATION	9
PUSH/PULL FACTORS FOR EGYPTIAN MIGRATION ²	11
EGYPTIAN DIASPORA'S ROLE IN THE REVOLUTION	13
MIGRATION CONCERNS: POLITICAL PLAYERS AND THEIR RESPONSES	15
POLITICAL PARTY PROGRAMS	15
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE PLATFORMS	16
FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS	18
BIBLIOGRAPHY	22




Introduction

In reviewing migration flows in and out of Egypt after the Arab ‘Spring’ and the events leading to the Egyptian Revolution in January 25th, 2011, the initial suspicion and resistance to any information dissemination was noted by the researcher as a definite change in attitude in the country after the revolution. This may be attributed to recent raids on U.S. funded pro-democracy NGO’s among others and accusations of foreign interference in domestic affairs. Along with the volatile political situation in the aftermath of the revolution, distrust runs rampant, as well as a low prioritization with regards to migration issues in the grand scheme of daily crisis. In the absence of a president, a constitution and an active police force, the situation in Egypt is less than ideal for conducting proper research. However, this study attempts to give a snapshot of the most recent migration trends in and out of Egypt since the revolution. It addresses various political parties’ and prominent figures’ perception on migration policy and its position in the current political dialogue.

The first part of this paper will review the developments over the past fifteen months—January 2011 till April 2012—of Egyptian immigration policy. Interviews were conducted with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Africa & Middle East Refugee Assistance (AMERA) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Office in Cairo (UNHCR) as well as migration expert, Ayman Zohry. Although all those interviewed agreed that there was no official change in policy before and after the revolution, regarding refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, the most significant difference, post revolution, is the presence of a refugee camp along the border area near Salloum, as a response to the crisis in Libya. Therefore, this paper will review the development of this particular aspect of incoming migration to Egypt. In addition, opinions differ on conditions of refugees in Egypt during the period following the revolution. According to some, refugees suffered from xenophobia and increased discrimination, due to the lack of security presence throughout the country and because of on-going rumors of third party manipulations in domestic affairs, while others refute this argument based on a lack of evidence. Both the above viewpoints will also be presented in this study.

The second section of this study reviews Egyptian emigration issues after the revolution. University professors, political activists, political party founding members, analysts and experts were interviewed for their feedback on migration issues in Egypt and possible policy developments. Not surprisingly, most of those interviewed initially had not considered migration issues among their top priorities, given the current political turmoil. However, as the interviews proceeded, each considered it an important aspect of their programs, which needs to be developed. The most notable common denominator identified across the board is the need to improve skills and education in order to make Egyptians more employable and/or competitive in the job market, both domestically and in the international arena. The third part of this study is based on secondary sources and results of two focus group discussions. It entails a review of the various political party programs and the presidential candidates’ programs specifically dealing with migration issues in and out of Egypt. Due to the campaign requirements of the presidential candidates it was impossible to attain one-on-one interviews, however a thorough review of candidates’ on-line programs as well as their interviews on television and in newspapers gives a general perspective on their stand on issues relating to migration. Two focus group discussions were conducted with young Egyptian adults, one group representing highly educated graduates, while the second



group was composed of unemployed highly skilled young adults. The discussions centered on migration intentions in relation to recent events in Egypt. Attendants in both sessions identified a shift in their expectations from the months right after the revolution till the time of the focus group discussions, which were prior to the presidential election.

Immigration Policy in Egypt After the Arab Spring

Egyptian government policy has not changed since the advent of the Egyptian Revolution in January 2011; status determination for refugees and asylum seekers continues to be the responsibility of UNHCR, which continues to work closely with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as its counterpart as well as cooperating with other stakeholders. According to 2012 UNHCR country operations profile, “While Egypt is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Convention, it has yet to develop domestic asylum procedures and institutions.”¹ Ambassador Salah Elwassimy, Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for Refugees at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, confirmed in an interview that, “there is no difference before or after the revolution in the way we handle refugees in Egypt.”²

Reinforcing the longstanding migration policy, Elwassimy stated, “we will not allow refugee camps on Egyptian territory.”³ Egypt has always assimilated refugees in an urban setting. However, the need for a make shift camp on the border in the no man’s territory between Egypt and Libya, arose in order to deal with the incoming persons of concern, due to the Libyan Crisis in February 2011. Estimates of up to 475,000 people crossed the border in Salloum including Libyans, third country nationals (TCNs) and refugees, according to a 2012 UNHCR country operations profile report.

To date, it is estimated that some 238,000 Libyans have returned home, while 15,300 Libyans who entered through Saloum are still living in Egypt.

UNHCR established a presence in Saloum, a small town close to the border, at the beginning of the crisis to address immediate needs. Many people were unable to enter Egypt due to restrictions applied by the Government and remained stranded in the border area for days awaiting transportation back home. In collaboration with its partners, UNHCR provided food, water, blankets and hygiene items. With the Government's permission, UNHCR then erected temporary structures in the border area to be used as short-term shelter.

More than 1,600 people of concern to UNHCR, who cannot return home, remain stranded at the Saloum border. For this group, UNHCR is providing essential services as well as carrying out registration, conducting RSD and making referrals for resettlement. Other agencies operating at the border withdrew as of 30 June 2011, and UNHCR has assumed responsibility for the services they had provided and plans to maintain a field presence until end 2012.⁴

1 UNHCR on-line News Stories, 22 March 2012, UNHCR Works to Improve Conditions for Hundreds at Egyptian Border.[file:///Users/hendhafezsheta/Desktop/migration%20flow%202011:12/Immigratio,%20Refugee:asylum-seekers/UNHCR%20profile%202012-%20Egypt.webarchive](http://www.unhcr.org/refugees/news/2012/3/20120322-egypt-unhcr-works-improve-conditions-hundreds-egyptian-border.html)

2 Interview March 28, 2012 with Amb. Salah Elwassimy, Deputy Foreign Minister for Refugees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cairo, Egypt.

3 Ibid.

4 Egypt 2012 UNHCR country operations profile <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486356.html>

Salloum Camp

In order to manage the Libyan crisis, UNHCR worked closely with IOM and the Egyptian government; while UNHCR handled persons of concern, refugees and asylum seekers, IOM assisted many third country nationals to return home. According to Siobhan Simojokim, IOM Cairo, "IOM assisted tens of thousands of third country nationals (TCNs) who fled to Egypt from Libya, working in close collaboration with Government, UN and NGO partners to provide humanitarian and onward transportation assistance to those arriving at the border."⁵ According to UNHCR's Karmen Sakhr, "we are still in the middle of the change. The 'Salloum caseload' is the immediate result of the Arab Spring."⁶

Countries of resettlement such as the U.S., Sweden, and Canada among others, made slots available for refugees in order to help alleviate the crisis situation that developed as a result of the Libyan revolution. However, this may have resulted in a form of pull factor for some asylum seekers who were not necessarily fleeing the crisis situation in Libya itself, but had other reasons to flee their countries of origin, nevertheless, and were heading towards Salloum. Therefore, in response, a cut off date was set in October 2011. Accordingly, anyone arriving in Salloum after this date is not considered part of the 'Salloum caseload' and, hence, will not be considered for resettlement. Elwassimy said the date was 23rd October, 2011, while Sakhr referred to the 26th of October, 2011 as the cut off date. Regardless, of this discrepancy in dates, the application of a cut-off date has resulted in a decrease in the number of arrivals at the border according to UNHCR, but not a complete halt.

After the cut off date no one will be registered, from October 26th there continue to be people coming but ever since then, the numbers have decreased. Whoever, comes after the date can be persons of concern but they will not be considered as the caseload for resettlement. First we'll have to go through their claim, either they'll be in need of protection or not. If they are rejected on appeal within a month, then in this case they are not persons of concern. According to UNHCR if the file is closed our relationship ends here. Whether they are allowed to stay in the country [or not,] it is up to the government [of Egypt] and it is up to the person what they'll do next. They are not persons of concern. We, as UNHCR, can't do anything. The people will be notified, they will no longer benefit from assistance, food items, health care or any of our projects. The camp is for those that are in the process or waiting [for status determination or resettlement] but after the case is closed or if they arrived after the cut off date, they will not be part of the 'Salloum caseload'[however] they can be part of the asylum process.⁷

5 Email sent by Siobhan Simojokim May 3rd, 2012 to Hend Hafez, with official responses to questions asked during the interview of March 27th, 2012 at IOM office in Cairo, Egypt.

6 Interview April 5th, 2012 with Karmen Sakhr, Senior Protection officer, UNHCR.

7 Ibid.


Therefore the situation for those that arrived after the October 2011 cut-off date is precarious, to say the least, since it is not clear what is to be done with them. If there is no chance for them to be resettled as part of the Salloum 'caseload' and they are in the 'no mans land' of the border crossing area, they are not on Egyptian soil. The question arises, where will their asylum determination process take place? Will they be allowed into Egypt and become part of the urban refugee community in this country? Or will they be sent to Libya for their asylum procedures to be carried out in that country? Might they remain in the Salloum border crossing area till their status determination papers are completed, which may take several years? No one seems to want to answer these questions clearly at this time. It remains to be seen what will happen to these asylum seekers between the borders once the dust settles from the Arab spring, and newly established governments develop their respective migration policies.

In response to the Salloum border situation, the Egyptian Prime Minister, Kamal El Ganzoury, announced an increase in water and food supplies to the Matrouh governorate. In addition, he established a committee consisting of members of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior and the Governor of Matrouh that will monitor developments in the situation and report directly to the Prime Minister's office, in coordination with UNHCR and resettlement countries. In addition, Fayza Abou El Naga, Minister of International Cooperation stated that, "The Prime Minister's decision to enhance services to the border crossing area and providing supplies was a humanitarian method of addressing a crisis situation. There will also be coordination with the Libyan counterpart, in the Foreign Ministry, to limit additional crossings and to maintain current numbers. In addition, one million dollars from the Arab Social and Economic Development Fund will be used for the refurbishment and development of the Salloum border crossing."⁸ Abou El Naga confirmed the presence of 1,952 persons from different nationalities in the Salloum camp, all of which were awaiting resettlement except for 47 rejected individuals who do not meet the criteria for refugee status. She pointed out that the above mentioned decisions were by the Prime Minister were made to protect Egyptian national security and resolve the situation that the governorate of Matrouh and the city of Salloum find themselves in. She explained that the procedures for resettlement will take up to one year. There is a clear contrast between the national security approach, which incorporates both the ministry of defense as well as the ministry of interior as part of the committee monitoring the situation and the statement made by Abou El Naga regarding humanitarian concerns.

Given that UNHCR has a hundred staff members on a caseload of 45,000 asylum seekers and refugees throughout Egypt, it relies on Islamic Relief, a U.K. based NGO, as the main implementing partner that provides support in the Salloum camp. "While IOM is now scaling down its own operations at the border, it will maintain a presence at the border as UNHCR's implementing partner for the provision of primary health care and referrals of TCNs and persons of concern (PoCs) who remain in the area awaiting resettlement or other solutions,"⁹ says Sijojoki.

8 Ahram online, May 1, 2012 p.1.file:///Users/hendhafezsheta/Desktop/migration%20flow%202011:12/Immigratio,%20Refugee:asylumseekers/20 %20 %20 قرارات %20 عاجلة %20 للجنزوري %20 لحل %20 مشكلة %20 العالقين %20 بمنفذ %20 السلوم مصر - %20 .webarchive

9 Email sent by Siobhan Sijojoki May 3rd, 2012 to Hend Hafez, with official responses to questions asked during the interview of March 27th, 2012 at IOM office in Cairo, Egypt.



Although the quota, which is determined by each country and allocated to UNHCR for resettlement slots, has nearly doubled after the revolution, from approximately 1000 in 2010 to 2000 in 2011 and 2012 respectively, due mainly to the influx caused by the Libya crisis, it is still a very small percentage of the total refugees found in the country and, therefore, can not be considered as the main durable solution for refugees in Egypt. Be that as it may, the viable two durable solutions that remain as options for the majority of refugees in Egypt are repatriation or local integration. Repatriation is only applicable as a solution when it is voluntary and when the circumstances of the country of origin allow i.e. safe. Like the resettlement solution, the conditions for repatriation are limited to a chosen few. On the other hand, local integration at the moment, in the aftermath of the revolution, is even less likely to be a durable solution than it ever was. The employment questions that existed prior to the revolution have become even more acute, lack of security, and fear of an increasing sense of xenophobia, all add to the dire circumstances that refugees in Egypt find themselves.

The problem arises when legitimate options, the three durable solutions, are exhausted two unacceptable alternatives arise: one is irregular migration and the other is the warehousing of those awaiting status determination. Irregular migration refers to the movement of people without the proper documentation, which, in turn, translates to illegal presence in a country. This concern arises when the status determination of an asylum seeker is rejected as a refugee and the file is closed by UNHCR. Thus changing the person of concerns' status to one of irregularity in the country in which they find themselves, be it Egypt or any other country. Since all asylum seekers and refugees in Egypt have, up until the Libyan crisis, been in an urban setting, the closing of their file automatically turned their status to one of irregular migrants. Despite the many problems that arise from remaining in a country on an irregular basis; in an urban setting those who find themselves in such a situation at least manage to attain any kind of work in an informal manner and they often place their children in private schools, as well as pay for whatever medical care they may require, usually enlisting the help of humanitarian organizations and NGOs.

On the other hand, warehousing, describes the situation, where asylum seekers are in limbo, waiting for their destiny to be determined by others. They are not in a set up where they can have access to any form of income generation. The medical care that they receive, along with any form of schooling for their children, as well as their daily sustenance, are all provided for by the camp care takers. A debate of the advantages and disadvantages of the camp set-up is beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that if the asylum seeker's case is rejected and their file is closed, no longer being a person of concern to UNHCR, they can no longer benefit from any of the above-mentioned services in the camp. Yet they will not be able to access the informal market either, hence they will be in limbo. As mentioned previously, those at the Salloum border crossing that arrived after the cut-off date may find themselves in such a situation. If they do not have the proper papers to enter Egypt they will remain at the border. Although international organizations have been more than generous in caring for these individuals, this care, on a prolonged basis, does not replace the human dignity of participating in everyday life activities where there is a choice and a sense of belonging and empowerment. To sum up, given the limitations of the three durable solutions, those waiting on the border will only increase in number as may irregular migration within Egypt or to other countries as a result.

Local Perceptions of foreigners after the revolution

Opinions regarding refugees' situation in Egypt after the January 25th revolution differed among experts in the field. According to Tarek Mahrous, lawyer and protection Team Leader at AMERA (Africa & Middle East Refugee Assistance) refugees suffered from a lack of familiarity with their official documentation papers after the revolution. The military and local check points, were not familiar with refugee documents thus placing a constraint on their freedom of movement even more so than everyone else during and immediately following the revolution.

According to an IOM rapid assessment study conducted between 16th-23,¹² February 2011 of 115 phone interviews with migrants, even though there was a common sense of insecurity that was shared with Egyptians, a more extreme language was used to describe the general sense of insecurity, suggesting that refugees felt a growing sense of xenophobia.


This rapid assessment highlighted the vulnerabilities of migrants in Egypt after January 25th. In addition to vulnerabilities that migrants share with their fellow Egyptians such as economic problems arising from lack of cash (due to the closure of banks during the events) and from loss of (daily or more stable) employment, especially for those who work in the informal economy (which is likely to be high, due to migrants' difficulties in obtaining work permits). In addition to these concerns, migrants face particular challenges due to their residence status, as they are more likely to incur problems when crossing the numerous check-points, especially if their visas and/or passports are expired or not compliant with Egyptian regulations. Finally, reports of violence, xenophobia and suspicion towards foreigners accentuated migrants' perception of lack of security.¹⁰

On the other hand, Ayman Zohry, President of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies, stated that, "the regular refugees that are found in Egypt suffered the same fate as all Egyptians due to the lack of security. They were not a priority before the revolution and they became even less so after. Nobody had the time for them, so the negligence towards them increased after the revolution. I didn't hear of xenophobia but in the absence of security forces, there were operations in Sinai of smugglers of Africans going to Israel."¹¹ In addition, the lack of any actual reported cases of violence aimed specifically at foreigners downplays the xenophobia rhetoric.

Khaled Aly, a lawyer and activist running for the 2011 presidential elections in Egypt on an independent leftist platform, mentions refugees during several television interviews referring to the inhumane manner in which they were treated under the old regime. He refers to the Mustafa Mahmoud sit-in seven years ago when refugees tried to take a stand. "On 29 September 2005, Sudanese refugees began gathering at Mustafa Mahmoud Park in central Cairo for a protest that eventually swelled to between 1,800 to 2,500 protestors and lasted for three months until it was broken up by Egyptian security forces in the early hours of December 30. The

12 Pambazuka News, Pan African Voices for Freedom and Justice; The Tragedy of Mustafa Mahmoud Park; Patrick Burnett, 2006-06-22, Issue 60 <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/35334>

13 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7URslH0gpo>



protestors were demanding refugee status interviews, a clearer and transparent process, protection from the Sudanese government, protection of the vulnerable and investigation of detentions and mission persons. Egyptian security operatives forcefully ended the protest, an action that resulted in the death of 27 refugees and asylum seekers and the injuring of hundreds.”¹² Aly recalls this tragedy during his campaign for the presidency as evidence of the negligence and corruption suffered under the Mubarak regime, he states, “see how we treated the refugees and killed them in Mustafa Mahmoud. We should consider how we receive them here and how we treat them unequally.”¹³

In sum, it would appear that even though refugees and asylum seekers concerns are not at the forefront of political agendas at the moment, they stand to gain some form of legitimacy from the revolution, if only through human rights advocacy. According to Samer Soliman, founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, a center left political party, which was established in 2011 after the revolution, the party does not have a position on the issue of migration yet. However, he stressed both the issues of national security and human rights as two major points of significance that will need reviewing in terms of policy.

We need security on our borders but if someone crosses these borders illegally we cannot shoot them we must have a way of treating them with dignity and adhere to human rights...We need to put laws that have to do with migrants and refugees because even though we are not a country of destination we are becoming one by default. They are part of the informal economy. We need to find a way for legalizing these people so that we can protect their rights and keep them within the context of this nation's laws. If UNHCR refuses them or the files are closed then Egypt should require them to hand over the files so that the matter goes to Egyptian institutions. The country needs to be more engaged in the matter. In the next few years this should change. Egypt in the past few years, was not taking care of its citizens, better yet [even less so] the asylum seekers. We are speaking about a change and a democratic process with accountability and political agendas all this will affect refugees and asylum seekers alike. The country must pay attention not only to its citizens but also to those that are here as asylum seekers, everyone who is on Egyptian soil. In the next few years there will be a push towards legitimizing their position. It will be difficult at first, but then they will be incorporated within the new system... As a political party we haven't discussed this yet, but I imagine given the value system of this party, any position we take, will put these people's human rights into consideration. You can't divide human rights in one society, it has to be for everyone who resides on the territory of the same nation. It will be a test for all the different political trends in the country. You can't have one set of laws for Egyptians and another for non-Egyptians it will not work.¹⁴

Emigration Issues Post Egyptian Revolution

“Migration has become a major issue in Egypt's economic policy with the outside world. Since the 1970s, Egypt's policy has been one of promoting migration as a

¹⁴ Interview with Samer Soliman, Associate Professor of Political Economy at the American University in Cairo and founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, May 2nd, 2012.



means of solving some of its economic problems such as unemployment and foreign exchange. Through the export of surplus labor, primarily to oil producing Gulf States and Libya (GCC countries), Egypt sought to reduce its foreign exchange deficit by increasing remittances.”¹⁵ Many of the reasons for migration of Egyptians remain the same before and after the revolution, namely poverty and unemployment. All those interviewed identified the need of developing new markets both for Egyptian products as well as migrant labor destinations. However, the difference was on the focus that was placed on Africa, Turkey and Iran as potential partners in Egypt’s future. Two main differences of reasons for migration after the revolution were the slow down of economic activity as well as the rise of the political Islamist movement in recent elections, which disturbed both moderate Moslems as well as members of the Christian community.

This section of the study focuses on the Egyptian revolution’s influence on Egyptian migration flows from the various viewpoints of political activists and key members of different political parties. The influence of the Egyptian returnees from Libya on the local front will be considered. The importance of developing skills through vocational training and improvements in the educational system as a means of influencing the push/pull factors that lead to migration will be analyzed. And a review of the effect of the Egyptian diaspora on the domestic political arena will be examined.

Returnees


Regarding Egyptian returnees, “IOM recognized the need to assist the estimated 200,000 Egyptian migrant workers who returned home due to the conflict in Libya; indeed, most returned to impoverished rural areas, exacerbating local unemployment pressures and placing additional strain on their communities. At the same time, IOM has recognized that the 25th of January events could create new migration-related opportunities in Egypt – such as renewed interest in supporting the country’s transition among citizens abroad.”¹⁶

Laila Soueif, Associate Professor of Mathematics Faculty of Science, Cairo University, a political activist and a member of the March 9th Movement, which is a movement that started in 2005 calling for academic freedoms and the independence of universities in Egypt stated:

Libya had an effect, of course, with the 2 million Egyptians working there. The bulk of travel to Libya was always irregular, people without papers. The borders were always very porous. Perhaps that is why there are catastrophes now, but it is always the case. My husband is from Behera, nearest to the desert, they say we travel ‘selkawy’ which can be translated as ‘through the wires’, meaning that they will not pass through the official border area. When Libya was in a good standing [internationally speaking], in the 1980s and 90s, every other farmer would travel for work and stay there for a couple of years. I expect that will happen again, once the situation stabilizes and there is money. Already,

¹⁵ Irregular Egyptian Migration of Unaccompanied Minors to Italy: a Journey of Death or Salvation? Hend Hafez, thesis submitted October 2010, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, American University in Cairo. p.1.

¹⁶ Email sent by Slobhan Simojokim May 3rd, 2012 to Hend Hafez, with official responses to questions asked during the interview of March 27th, 2012 at IOM office in Cairo, Egypt.



the last two years when Gaddafi signed agreements with Europe and the west he employed people again, university professors from Egypt and he paid well. There was a time when people used to migrate there for work like they did in the Gulf, then there came a time when things were a mess and nobody went. They would sometimes not pay for a service rendered and there was abuse of migrants so people stopped going. Once relations improved with the U.S., he tried to attract people [Egyptian professionals] to go once more and they found that once again they were paid good salaries and on time so they went again. When the revolution started these people came back in fear of war, not because they were supporting a certain regime or resistance movement, they just returned for safety purposes. The farmers stayed put as long as they could, then they came back too by car. University professors and engineers came back one way or another, and once the situation was stable again they returned right away. It is clear that the new Libyan government asked them to return immediately.¹⁷

Zohry confirms Soueif's estimates stating, "around 800,000 Egyptians returned from Libya. It was estimated before that, there were approximately 2 million Egyptians in Libya, meaning that approximately 40% of estimated Egyptians returned from Libya. This has nothing to do with the Egyptian Revolution it had to do with the events in Libya starting the 17th of February 2011...The return of migrants from Libya has had a huge impact that is still undocumented in terms of its effect on the unemployment rate."¹⁸ However, most of those interviewed forecast that once Libya was stable the migration flows would return to their previous direction, providing Egyptian migrants with potential work opportunities. Naguib Sawiris, founder of the Free Egyptians Party, the largest of the newly established liberal parties in Egypt and Executive Chairman of Orascom Telecom Media & Technology (OTMT) stated, "the usual type of migration, which was labor going to Libya and Saudi Arabia, will continue because the economy is shrinking and there will be more joblessness. It will take a couple of years in order to revive the economy and people can't wait a couple of years, so migration will continue in that direction."¹⁹

Skills and Education


Magdy Qurqur, Parliamentarian and Secretary General of the Labor Party, a small Islamist political format, stated, "we are not against Egyptian labor migration especially to Arab countries. However, we should ensure the proper skills of the migrants in order to maintain a competitive edge over migrants from the Far East. Egyptian migrants currently are unskilled and their Indian and Pakistani counterparts are more competitive in Arab countries."²⁰ On the other hand, Amr Darrag, the Secretary General of the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) in Giza, the political arm of the Moslem Brotherhood and the relative majority party in parliament, said, "through circular migration we can maintain a balance, [i.e.] just like we need help in

17 Interview with Laila Soueif, Associate Professor of Mathematics, Faculty of Science, Cairo University, April 22, 2012.

18 Interview with Ayman Zohry, President and Expert in the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies, April 19, 2012.

19 Interview with Naguib Sawiris, Executive Chairman of Orascom Telecom Media & Technology and founder of the Free Egyptians Party, April 29th, 2012.

20 Interview with Magdy Qurqur, Secretary General of the Labor Party, Deputy of the Housing, Public Utilities and Reconstruction Committee in Parliament, professor at Cairo University, Urban Development department, April 19th, 2012.



development [from developed countries], so too do the neighboring nations need us. Libya can easily absorb three million of our labor force, Sudan can use help in agricultural projects, the Gulf traditionally used Egyptian labor[and should continue to do so]...We need to work not just as cheap labor, we can also bring technical know-how. My main resource is the human being, I can employ them in Libya, Sudan or in Egypt. We produce humans, instead of making it a burden, it can be an advantage,”²¹

All the political parties and figures reinforce the importance of developing human resources through education and vocational training in order to provide Egyptians with more marketable skills. According to the Egyptian Social Democratic Party Soliman explains, “we are not for promoting migration, even though citizens have a right to migrate, our program will not promote this. Our program is based on human resources as an asset not a burden. If things improve in the country, there will be a lot of returnees to Egypt and this will serve the country very much. Even if they return for a short period of time only, they will still help the country, like they do in Israel where they have dual citizenship and spend half the year in each country. We have a huge potential in those Egyptians in the diaspora who can participate in the development of the country, but definitely we will not be promoting migration at all. Whoever wants to migrate can go ahead, but it is not in the interest of the country to do so. We must put a stop to all the push factors because, unfortunately, it always pushes the best people out of the country.”²²


The Freedom and Justice Party rejects the old regime’s view that the size of the population is a burden. Instead it identifies the reasons for migration and tries to address them. The FJP highlights the lack of economic opportunity, unemployment, political pressure and the lack of freedom as well as the low standard of living as the major push factors in Egypt that lead to migration. Darrag states, “we look at the population as a major resource upon which the opportunity for development is based. The problem is that this resource is not skilled for many of the available opportunities. They are not well prepared coming out of the universities or the vocational training schools; nor are they properly distributed according to demand in the labor market. The skills are very low and so many students are studying in the university literature and law when there isn’t a demand for it as much. Then they have to re-train themselves in skills that can provide them with an actual work opportunity.”²³

Representing the Labor Party Qurqur agrees, “I think Egypt needs to look once more to vocational schools, and concentrate more on them. We have to revisit the numbers that are accepted in universities, we should not accept more candidates than available places in schools. If it were up to me, I would pay the same salaries for vocational school graduates as those graduating from universities. If we are serious about encouraging vocational schools then we have to do this. Vocational

21 Interview with Amr Darrag, Secretary General, Giza Freedom and Justice Party, professor at Cairo University, Engineering Department, April 22, 2012.

22 Interview with. Samer Soliman, Associate Professor of Political Economy at the American University in Cairo and founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, May 2nd, 2012.

23 Interview with Amr Darrag, Secretary General, Giza Freedom and Justice Party, professor at Cairo University, Engineering Department, April 22, 2012.



schooling should not be inside classrooms, it should be hands on in the field, and the factory, as well as the small workshop in order to gain professional experience. In this way we can develop proper skills. And I think this is where there can be a role for the European Union to cooperate with Egypt. We can develop vocational education to the extent that it establishes a highly skilled labor force. After they graduate we can raise their skills even more, by placing them in training centers that cooperate with companies and institutions.”²⁴

On the other hand, some activists emphasized the need to reallocate Egypt’s entire national budget in a way that reflects the importance of developing the human resource aspect. According to Soueif, “education only receives 9 to 10 % of the budget which is ridiculous given that it services over 50% of the population. Countries that don’t have such high numbers of youth, give education 18 to 20 % of their total budget...[Egypt’s] education needs to be allocated 20 or 25 % of the total budget while health has to have 15 %. This will improve health and education radically because currently health takes 3% and education less than 10%, then the army or the internal security forces can take less, it’s not my problem. I am not discussing the size of the budget, I am speaking of a percentage. Who says the percentage should be divided like this.”²⁵ Soueif also called for an increase in the number of universities in the country, pointing to the fact that in countries with similar population size and taking into consideration the number of youth in proportion to the population, Egypt only has 15 public universities whereas a country like Iran has over 50 state universities and Turkey has over 100. She explains, “in the developed world big universities have 20,000 to 30,000 students. Currently, Cairo University has 160,000 students and Ein Shams University has 200,000 students.”²⁶

Push/Pull Factors for Egyptian Migration


Although the shortcomings of the educational system have a direct effect on the skill level of Egyptians it is not the only factor of importance to be analyzed when reviewing migration flows after the January 25th revolution. According to Sawiris an increase in three types of migration can be expected. “one is the Copts and Christians who will be very scared from fundamentalist rule, which has already started because the number of visas to Europe, Canada and the U.S. is increasing and they are mostly Christians...[The second type is] the migration of businessmen who are related or associated with the old regime and they have already migrated. Most of them have already left and many of them will be reluctant to come back because of fear of persecution, whether rightly or wrongly, since many innocent people were persecuted. And [finally] you will have migration of the ultra modern Moslem who is not in agreement with changing their life pattern. Many of them will say, ‘I will not live under this new scheme.’ Perhaps some will accept the infringement on their freedoms and they’ll stay, but others won’t and they will leave too. I don’t think it is a large number, the Christians will leave in larger numbers than the moderate Moslems who will try and accommodate the new system.”²⁷

24 Interview with Magdy Qurqur, Secretary General of the Labor Party, Deputy of the Housing, Public Utilities and Reconstruction Committee in Parliament, professor at Cairo University, Urban Development department, April 19th, 2012.

25 Interview with Laila Soueif, Associate Professor of Mathematics, Faculty of Science, Cairo University, April 22, 2012.

26 Ibid.

27 Interview with Naguib Sawiris, Executive Chairman of Orascom Telecom Media & Technology and founder of the Free Egyptians Party, April 29th, 2012.



Reinforcing this argument, Soliman explains, “push factors exist and I think it increased after the revolution. There was always an out migration even before the revolution that had to do with economics and the standard of living. [However] people don’t always look for money alone, they search for a better quality of life, or political freedom. There are a lot of reasons for people to migrate. But after the revolution this increased due to the giant Islamic movement that is entering the political arena. The lack of security in the country and the rise of the Islamic movement, are the two main factors that lead to migration...The upper middle class is the most sector in society that is migrating, because it is worried about the political situation and the issues of security.”²⁸

However, many young professionals and members of the diaspora returned to Egypt during the revolution. Soueif attributes the return of highly educated professionals to the fact that they have the ability to go back and forth easily between Egypt and the country where they currently reside, pointing to the fact that many of them are bi-national. She uses her son, AlaaAbd El-Fatah, a well known activist in the revolution and her sister Ahdaf Soueif, a famous author and widow of a British citizen, as examples of people who were inspired to return during the revolution in order to have an input. Other examples are her nephew, who is a British citizen and Khaled Abdallah, the actor who left a prominent career to return to make documentaries on the Egyptian revolution.

“I’ve also noticed a lot of the people that are in the Gulf or even in the U.S. coming very often on vacations and they come straight to the revolution, meaning they head straight for any protest, march or sit-in immediately. As if they are coming down to visit the revolution. Our colleagues coming for ten days vacation call us up to ask ‘OK, what’s up, where is the protest? How can I participate?’ They want to spend all ten days participating. It’s like a new type of tourism: revolutionary tourism. Even if there isn’t a return flow as of yet, there is a noticeable desire headed in that direction. If the situation here improves even a quarter of a percent, a lot of people will return. The interesting thing is that this is happening to people whose economic situation abroad is not difficult. They are comfortable, they migrated a long time ago, they have been naturalized, they have jobs and they have a lot of opportunities.”²⁹

Soliman, on the other hand, attributes the lull in emigration right after the revolution to the closing of embassies and the lack of a viable institutional structure in Egypt at that time. Yet he also mentions the euphoria that followed the Arab Spring and the sense of possibility and optimism in those early months when the Egyptian diaspora rediscovered their Egyptian roots. Highlighting the pride that Egyptians felt when traveling in those days and being greeted with such respect that had not been experienced in a long time. However, this was all driven by a romantic ideal that was promoted through the media. Soliman emphasizes, “that romantic ideal gave the misguided perception that all of Egypt’s problems were going to be solved and that was not realistic. Nothing gets solved that fast.”³⁰

28 Interview with Samer Soliman, Associate Professor of Political Economy at the American University in Cairo and founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, May 2nd, 2012.

29 Soueif, op.cit.

30 Soliman, op.cit.

Egyptian Diaspora's Role in the Revolution

Technology had an even more significant influence on the Egyptians abroad, the diaspora, during the Egyptian revolution through communication. According to Soliman, the migration of Christian Copts to the U.S. and Europe in the past lead to their radicalization. The positive aspect of this radicalization was the imminent human rights discourse while the negative element came in the form of the persecution discourse.

The technological revolution reduced the gap between the country and those abroad. The Coptic community abroad have something that the Muslims don't have and that is the institution of the church. The Egyptian communities that live in those countries everywhere surround the Coptic churches. In the last 15 years the gap between Copts in and out of the country was reduced with the Internet and the ease of communication. This has radicalized Copts, especially abroad, in terms of human rights and, in some cases, through sectarianism... they think that the bases or values of Islam actually create violence and are to be fought. So the Copts abroad influenced those in the country and this affected internal politics.


Some of the influences on the Egyptian revolution came in many instances from outside the country from many different directions. The [Egyptian] Muslim diaspora in the Arab gulf also had a great deal of influence. So we are talking about the Islamic radicalization through globalization as well. The 'salafization,' if the term exists, of Egypt is due to globalization and it has to do with migration.

The effect of the migration of Egyptians to the Gulf States had an obvious influence on the country both socially and politically, as did the radicalization of the Coptic migrants. The difference is that most Copts migrated to North America, Australia or Europe which are Western democracies and that had an influence. The influence of the Islamic groups comes from conservative oil producing countries with conservative regimes. The context in which they live is different.

There are two different influences on the Coptic migrants. One is the effect of the human rights discourse, that is the progressive aspect. When you are discriminated against, you put it in a human rights context and that is the progressive influence. That seeped into certain areas of society and found it's way into the Egyptian dialogue. The second influence, on the other hand, is negative and regressive, it comes from the U.S. not from Europe. The U.S. is more conservative and it has politically aspiring religious groups, therefore, some of the Copts in the U.S. have a bad influence [domestic Egyptian politics] by putting things in the context of persecution discourse rather than one of human rights. They [too, like Moslems] become fundamentalist in thought.³¹

In a video address to the Coptic community abroad Abdel Moneim Abou El Fotouh an independent presidential candidate running for 2011 elections, with political Islam affiliations (an ex-Moslem Brotherhood member) as well as liberal aspirations said the following:

³¹ Ibid.



I am sending a message to all my Christian brothers and sisters... I know and sympathize with, some Christian brothers who were disturbed by the scene that followed the revolution. Those who hate Egypt and want to divide and weaken it were able to raise many fears in my Christian brothers. I know that some Christians among others are considering emigrating and leaving Egypt, this is actually something that disturbs me a lot because after the 25th January revolution we all should cooperate to build Egypt. I am rigorously saying that no citizen, in particular Christians, will be oppressed.

I am urging every Moslem to respect the rights of his Christian brothers and non-Moslem. They all have the same rights and duties... You are the builders of this civilization and your duty is to continue facing any attempts to marginalize you or to derogate your rights as indigenous Egyptian citizens who have the same rights and duties...

wish I can go to every Egyptian abroad to urge him, and put my hand in his hands to return to build the new Egypt, the strong Egypt that should be for all Egyptians with no discrimination on race, religion, color or on gender basis.³²

Regardless of the validity of the radicalization argument, a more positive image comes to most Egyptian minds when discussing the diaspora, namely remittances and brain gain. According to the monthly financial statement published by the Ministry of Finance in its general overview of the Egyptian economy as of April 2012, "The net flows of private remittances grew by 28% to achieve U.S. \$ 7.9 billion compared to U.S. \$ 6.2 billion during the same period of the last fiscal year, this is due to the increase in remittances from Egyptians working abroad."³³

Many of the presidential candidates and the political party platforms identify the importance of using the expertise of Egyptians abroad to facilitate and promote development programs at home, hence the concept of the brain gain. This will be reviewed in the next section.

32 <http://www.coptstoday.com/Copts-News/Detail.php?id=14237#.T68hsugtgc>

33 Monthly Financial Statement, Ministry of Finance, General Overview of the Egyptian Economy, April 2012, Vol. 7 Issue 6.
<http://www.mof.gov.eg/MOFGallerySource/Arabic/overview.pdf>

Migration Concerns: Political Players and their Responses

In searching through the various political party programs and the presidential candidates platforms it is striking to note how very little is mentioned on migration. Out of a total of 37 political parties only three parties have a brief note about the topic. In this section a review of the three political parties' statements will be presented, along with brief summaries of what each of the top seven presidential candidates has to say about migration. And finally, the outcome of the two focus group discussions that were conducted for this study is presented.

Political Party Programs

It is noteworthy that the three political parties that address issues of migration in their programs are all liberal parties. The first party is the largest of the liberal political parties established after the revolution in 2011, the Free Egyptians Party. In the party program, the First Section: Rights and Freedoms:

Each individual has the right of movement within the borders of the country. Each individual has the right to leave the country as well as the right to return to it.[#13] Each individual has the right to seek asylum in other countries or try to seek asylum fleeing persecution. Anyone who was under trial for non-political crimes or for other acts against the international law should be excluded from this right.[#14] Each individual has the right of a citizenship and cannot be forcefully denied citizenship nor can the individual be denied the right to change that citizenship.[#15]³⁴

The second political party that mentions migration also adheres to a liberal ideology, Egypt Freedom Party, formed May 11th, 2011 but remains officially unlicensed.

The party pays special attention to the rights of the marginalized groups and those vulnerable to human rights violations and to political, economic or social marginalization such as children, religious and ethnic minorities, refugees and migrants. The party policies [focus on] the rights for these groups and helps them to completely integrate in the state's activities and institutions without discrimination...The party works to remove all the reservations that the Egyptian government has put on the international conventions such as: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families³⁵

The third party that mentions migration is the Democratic Front Party, with a liberal ideology as well.

Respect of Human Rights: The party believes it is necessary to activate the main principles of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the seven

34 <http://www.almasreyeenalahrrar.org/PartyProgram.aspx#ChapterOne>

35 <http://www.masralhureyya.org/about-party/program/humanrights>

international conventions, one of them is the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families³⁶

It is clear by the research outcome that the novelty of the democratic process and the time constraints of elections have had an impact on many political parties' ability to present themselves and their programs properly on the Internet. In addition, as mentioned earlier, with events occurring at a head-spinning rate in Egypt and the region at large, migration issues have not taken a priority yet in political programs. This could change in the near future once the situation is more stable. As with the political parties, the presidential candidates had little or nothing to say about migration in their programs. It must be noted that the presidential elections are on going as this research is being conducted.

Presidential Candidate Platforms

Amr Moussa is the presidential candidate that has the most to say in his platform regarding issues of migration. Perhaps due to his long-standing career in the diplomatic service, he has incorporated several points in his extensive 86 page program, identified below.

Efficient economic management of land owned by the State through the creation of a specialized ministry to assume the responsibility of land management and sale. The critical and sensitive nature of this issue demands a thorough and detailed discussion with parliament and all relevant state bodies to decide on strategic terms of how to manage this issue. This would conclude in a unified law regulating the allocation and sale of State land, including land that is allocated for sale to Egyptians abroad (40-50 thousand feddans worth \$14-15 billion).p.34

Opening institutional and permanent communication channels between Egyptian minds abroad at world universities and research centers, to tap into their expertise and connections with the aim – in parallel with comprehensive overhaul of the scientific research and innovation system – to encourage the majority of them to return to Egypt or effectively contribute in restructuring Egypt's scientific research community.p.71

Making millions of Egyptians abroad the top priority in foreign policy and defending their interests, rights and dignity. Egyptian expatriates are no longer merely individuals seeking employment or an education abroad, but have grown in numbers, formed families and have become communities that will hold economic, social and scientific sway in many countries around the world. From Australia in the East to Canada and the US in the West, as well as Arab and European countries. They are all eager to participate in rebuilding the motherland.

Accordingly, guaranteeing the political rights of Egyptians abroad by allowing them to vote in elections and referendums is the correct path, which should be followed by a fundamental change in dealing with Egyptian communities abroad to facilitate, and encourage their positive participation in political, economic and social reconstruction. In addition, the ex-pat community can

36 http://www.democraticfront.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97:2010-03-31-18-33-13&catid=69:2010-03-31-18-17-03&Itemid=113

play a key role in realizing Egypt's scientific renaissance, and connecting them and their children directly to Egypt through cultural activities.

There is also an urgent need to address the challenges and obstacles that Egyptians face in specific regions such as the Arab Gulf states, which require close monitoring by state agencies before citizens travel to guarantee their rights and dignity. This includes close and continuous follow-up by embassies and consulates abroad, which will be a key criterion in annual assessments of the performance of embassies and consulates abroad.³⁷p.82

In an email responding to this study that was sent out on May 3rd, 2012 to all the presidential candidates at the time, only Ahmed Shafik, ex-minister of Civil Aviation (2002-2011) and Hosni Mubarak's last appointed prime minister (January – March 2011), replied on May 16th writing:

I certainly give the issue of Egyptians abroad a special priority in my presidential program, which sets the general trends regarding this issue as follows:

- Legalizing the situation of the Egyptians working abroad;
- Working on developing the diplomatic and consular missions in order to protect the Egyptians' rights and to improve the level of services offered to them;
- Providing Egyptians abroad with real opportunities to invest in Egypt and to participate in the process of development;
- Strengthening the relationship with the second generation of the Egyptians abroad, and developing programs and mechanisms that will help them maintaining the cultural identity in order to keep them always connected to their homeland; and
- Making the best use of the expertise of the Egyptian scientists abroad in order to ameliorate the education programs and scientific research in Egypt.


These trends will be implemented through policies and decisions that will lead us to achieve the goals.³⁸

On his campaign trail in a conference in Mahalla, Mohamed Morsy, the presidential candidate for Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Moslem Brotherhood, emphasized the importance of the Egyptian migrants abroad and promoting their interests. Morsy focused on paying equal attention to the Egyptian migrant workers' rights as those back home, stating that, "they belong to the same nation and should enjoy the same rights and dignity."³⁹ He also called upon the cooperation of Egyptian embassies to promote the rights of Egyptian migrants, giving them their due respect and dignity while outside their country of origin.

37 http://www.amremoussaforegypt.com/political_campaign/program_ar.php

38 email dated May 16th, 2012 to ayghaly@googlemail.com

39 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkgwuNg7EpE>



Another candidate with a religious political affiliation Abdel Moneim Abou El Fotouh, who resigned from the Moslem Brotherhood after the revolution in order to run independently in the presidential race, addressed a wider constituency by appealing to liberal candidates along with his traditional conservative base. In a conference addressing youth in Alexandria during his campaign, Abou El Fotouh stated, “we will not allow any Egyptian to migrate. The youth of Egypt will not migrate in perforated boats, and we will not allow them to migrate to the Gulf countries under the Kafala system. Egypt will be amongst the strongest twenty countries within the coming ten years, God willing.”⁴⁰ The Kafala system to which he is referring is imposed on migrants in the Arab Gulf states requiring all migrant workers to have a national sponsor. According to opponents of this system, rather than protecting migrants and their rights, which was its’ original intent, the Kafala system has been abused and corrupted to the point of degrading migrant workers often leading to their exploitation. Thus many human rights activists call upon a change or an amendment of this system.

Khaled Aly, the youngest presidential candidate running independently on a leftist platform emphasizes the importance of improving relations with other African nations that have been neglected by the previous regime. He mentions on several occasions during interviews the importance of dealing with refugees in a fair and just manner. In addition, two other candidates running on a leftist platform Hamdeen Sabahy and Hesham Bastawisi, mention the irregular migration of Egyptian youth to Italy as evidence of the failing economic policies of the previous regime. They both refer to the creation of job opportunities at home and the protection of human dignity as a means of addressing some of the root causes of this trend. In addition, Sabahy’s program makes a reference to using the expertise of the diaspora, calling upon them to assist in the development of the nation, whether through their know-how or through investments or both, in the renaissance plan.

Focus Group Findings

Finally, two focus group discussions were conducted in order to attain the feedback of young Egyptian men and women on the issue of migration. Both groups were between the ages of 20 to 30 years old, the first discussion was held on April 21st, 2012, while the second group discussion was held on April 24th, 2012. The groups met on the American University Campus in Tahrir, only a few meters away from Tahrir Square. During both group discussions the now famous Square was host to demonstrations by Salafi supporters of Hazem Abou Ismail, a popular presidential candidate that was removed from the race by court order because of the dual nationality of his mother. According to the Constitutional Declaration of 2011, under article 26: “It is required for whoever is elected president of the republic to be an Egyptian who has never held another citizenship, born of two Egyptian parents who have never held another citizenship, enjoying his/her political and civil rights, not married to a non-Egyptian, and not falling under the age of 40 years.”⁴¹ Hazem Abou Ismail’s mother, who is deceased, was purported to have an American passport and hence disqualified him from the presidential race, which he and his supporters adamantly contested. It is important to note that as a backdrop to the discussion on migration, having the religious chants of Abou Ismail enthusiasts and the traffic congestion caused by the

40 Online article in Al-Masry Al-Youm, April 30th, 2012.<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/80946>

41 Constitutional Declaration 2011, <http://www.egypt.gov.eg/english/laws/constitution/default.aspx>



sit-in stimulated many points that were brought up as influencing the decision to migrate by attendants.


The first focus group discussion was attended by highly educated professionals representative of graduates from various universities in Egypt among them Cairo University, El Azhar University, the American University in Cairo, and the Modern Academy. Among the eight participants were two women, both Moslems as well as Christians were represented in the group, the participants' political affiliations ranged from across the political spectrum to include liberals, leftist, and conservatives, alike. All of the participants were employed and all of them were present during the revolution in 2011. Most of them were hopeful in the period right after the revolution that things would improve but as time went by they all discussed the possibility of migrating as an option for a few years till circumstances improve. All those who mentioned migration were looking towards Europe and the Americas, one considered Latin America, specifically Argentina and Chile, while another considered any country in sub-Saharan Africa. None of them considered going to the Gulf or any Arab state.

Shady: I never had a specific destination but if I thought of it, I would consider the U.S. for higher education and I would think of going to Africa, somewhere in the South (Sub-Saharan Africa) for work purposes. I would definitely not consider migrating to any country in the Gulf, because I personally believe that what we are suffering from now in Egypt in terms of development is directly due to the brain drain that occurred in the 1980s. Our parents, to a great extent, had migrated mostly to the Gulf nations and to a greater extent Saudi Arabia and that has had an influence on the Wahhabi type thinking in our political system now and we see the Saudi flag being raised in Tahrir. [He points towards Tahrir Square where the chants from the demonstrations are getting louder and everyone in the room laughs, as if to say, they are ready to join him in any migration scheme.]⁴²

The quality of life and the ability to engage in political participation, as well as the protection of freedoms were among the concerns that were given priority in this group.

Al Amir: The problem is the absence of the state, and its' services. During the old regime the state was present in locations where it was not supposed to be and it was absent where it should have been. I mean it was in the university as a monitor for security purposes only. The main problem is the withdrawal of the state: where is it in terms of managing traffic? Where is it in the local district offices? Where are the services that the state is supposed to provide? We all end up in Cairo. I am one of the people that could have served my community better had I stayed in Alexandria, yet I was forced because of circumstance to move to Cairo. I believe that it is extremely unfair that all the other governorates don't have a metro rail. Why should they be taxpayers if they are not going to receive the same services as the capital? It is not fair, they should revolt. Why should everything be centralized in the capital city? Even the citizens in Cairo do not benefit from any state services...The root cause is that we need a viable government that is decentralized in a way that can provide services to all the different governorates on a fair and balanced bases without this extremely

42 Focus group discussion April 21, 2012, American University in Cairo.



one track approach...There is so much potential for development but their needs to be the will to develop from the political leadership in this country. Unfortunately, there is none. Everyone is thinking of his or her own self-interest. If Egypt is a country with strong institutions it will not be a sending country of migrants. Instead it might be a receiving country where Europeans can come and start a business, which in the current economic crisis might actually help them.⁴³

The issue of the rise of the Islamist political movement and the fear of fundamentalism preoccupied most of those who attended the discussion, especially of Christian religion.

Wael: I need to comment on the statement that the current circumstance is causing Christians to migrate or consider migration as an alternative. I am a Christian and this is true. Plan B has been moved to plan A because all the options seem to be Islamic in nature, the question is which type of Islamic. There is no other alternative, it is not between Islamic and liberal, it is between Islamic less conservative or more extreme. As a Christian you are basically just waiting for things to happen to you. One is no longer under the impression that ones' opinion will even be considered. Things will be done onto you without your participation what so ever. There is no longer a potential of participating, so I am very sorry to say I no longer believe in any of it. I cannot believe anyone. Marium:(Wael's finance) I was walking in the street [in a demonstration] and one guy said, 'Tomorrow you will wear the veil' another guy interjected and said 'Why should she wear it against her will. She will wear it out of conviction.' The impression being I will wear it one way or another.⁴⁴


At the end of the discussion everyone agreed that this is just the start of the revolution and, as one of the participants eloquently put it, current events in Egypt are like a mini series, "this is just the last chapter of Season I."⁴⁵ They all agreed that the next season starts with the cliffhanger of whether or not there will be a presidential election, and if so will it be successful, and how will the dilemma of the constitution be solved?

The second focus group discussion consisted of unemployed participants who were also professionals. Out of the six participants only one woman attended. Although more people had agreed to join in the discussions, the demonstrations in Tahrir lead to several cancelations. This group was also inclined to migrate. The discussion revolved around the economic reasons for migration as well as the general standard of living that included a quality of life, which was not seen as attainable in Egypt for the next few years. Two participants did not intend to migrate, while the young lady that attended wanted to go to Germany for a couple of years only, stating that migration was too much of a commitment. All she wanted was to go away for a few years in order to develop her skills and return to Egypt to find work and start a family. One of the participants is already on his way to Canada; he is an aviation engineer, one of 38 in his class.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.



Ashraf: I am migrating to Quebec. I have friends and relatives that live there, plus my political tendencies are socialist and it is the most socialist system in the nations that accept migrants. Plus, as you know, Canada is one of the top eight countries that manufacture airplanes and Quebec has 60% of this industry in Canada, so I am actually in demand there. They respect my profession, and me, which is something I did not get here. I applied in September 2011. They divided people into 3 categories, everyone waiting for their turn. They advanced me in the line of migration respecting my specialty, which is a priority to me. I am optimistic, it [Egypt] will improve, but it will take my lifetime for it to happen. I am not willing to wait that long, that is why I will migrate. If I had 1% chance of influencing the outcome or even being respected in my person by 1% I would remain. However I don't believe this is the case, there isn't even that small percentage so I must leave. This is my career and I don't feel I am respected here. Also in terms of my political affiliation being a leftist and as a Christian it is all working against me here. I am not afraid. I am optimistic in the long run.⁴⁶

In conclusion, changes that have occurred as a result of the Egyptian revolution give rise to both hope and fear. Everyone that was interviewed for this study identified the enormous potential of the country in the long run, however they all agreed that the current situation and the upcoming years are a challenge. Even though the politicians, both presidential candidates and political party figures, have not considered migration as a top priority in their respective programs, it will surely become so in the very near future. Whether as a solution to a problem or a problem in itself, migration policy will need to be set in a manner that will be conducive to the aspirations of a nation on the road to development. The manner in which any country or the European Union can be seen as playing a role in Egypt's development is always put in the context of mutual interests and equal opportunity. Assistance in development programs and vocational training centers is among the most common suggestions, in addition to circular and temporary migration schemes. Finally, the concept of providing Europeans with opportunities for investment and work as a solution to their own economic crisis was mentioned several times and advocated as an example of mutual interests. According to Darrag, "there are moral obligations on the West towards us because they are the ones that supported these dictatorships [old regimes], which brought our countries to such a state of regression. If they are really pro-democracy, then they should assist us in our development plans."⁴⁷

46 Focus group April 24th, 2012 American University in Cairo.

47 Interview with Amr Darrag, Secretary General, Giza Freedom and Justice Party, professor at Cairo University, Engineering Department, April 22, 2012.

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