

THEY DO NOT TREAT US LIKE HUMANS HERE

A study of Syrian refugees'
integration in Egypt

Abstract

While the current European integration regime focuses on 'cultural diversity' as either a challenge or an asset and takes an assimilative or multiculturalist direction, this paper looks beyond 'diversity' and challenges the prevalent perspective. By studying the integration of Syrian refugees in Egypt it aims at finding a new understanding to the integration process, other than one of cultural conflict. Six Syrian and Egyptian community workers are interviewed and a structure-actor analysis is conducted. With the help of scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Étienne Balibar, Engin Isin and Bridget Anderson, three structures are identified: a social structures that constructs the immigrated as Others, a class structure that pushes the immigrated towards economic exclusion and poverty, and a political structures that pushes the immigrated out of the political, with limited rights and opportunities. The paper finds that a new vocabulary on integration is needed: by perceiving integration as equality, the integration process is to be understood as a political struggle for rights in an unequal society.

Keywords: integration, othering, racism, structures, equality, Egypt

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1 Introduction

As migration continues to be a constant feature of the globalized world, integration continues to be a constant subject of political debate and academic research that highlights immigrated populations' difficulties with taking part in society. But on what presumptions are the debate, research and policy based? This paper questions the accuracy of an integration process of adoption, thankfulness and peaceful coexistence.

Integration could apply to any integration between groups in a society, such as age groups, social classes or subcultures, but has come to be more associated with integration between immigrated and local members of society, which is the only integration that is examined in this study. A matter often discussed and studied (see for example Entzinger 2014 and Schinkel 2013) regarding integration it whether the immigrated are to integrate or assimilate, where integration is understood as a two-way process where new-comers are included in different parts of society and the diversity they bring is embraced, but assimilation means that the immigrated population adjusts to the local and adopts its culture, language, values, etcetera. The assumption is that if the immigrated just share these features with the local population, they will be integrated *per se*. Integration is seen as a process that – under the right circumstances – happens naturally. Accordingly, immigrant integration in several European states is more about making the immigrated adjust to the local population, than about integration (SOU 2006:79:58 ff).

Among scholars of integration, immigrated persons' identification to different cultures appears to be a popular theme, and the overall question for researchers – and policy makers – seems to be how diversity should be managed. It appears to me that this precondition for studying integration leads to nowhere. On the one hand, policies that aim at uniformity through assimilation are counted out as discriminatory to minorities (see, for example, SOU 2006:79). On the other hand, multiculturalist policies that aim to embrace diversity are criticized for reproducing stereotypes and tend to accept economic inequality and marginalization as translated into cultural differences, and give a disadvantage to minority population in redistribution policies; it has “exclusionary tendencies” (Entzinger 2014:696-705; Schinkel 2013:1144).

Kamali *et al* argue that an integration strategy that is based on managing diversity legitimizes division between immigrated and local members of society, as it divides the population into an integrated local population, and a disintegrated immigrated population, and integration becomes the responsibility of the disintegrated. The local population is seen as carriers of a neutral culture, or no specific culture at all, while the immigrated carry exotic and different cultures: “because the current norms and conceptions divide ‘us’ from ‘the others’, ‘they’ will never become like ‘us’, but ‘they’ will constantly exist in a long process of struggling for integration [my translation]”

(SOU 2006:79: 60). Kamali *et al* explain that this strategy for integration – or even the idea of integration itself – is an expression of structural power, as the characteristics of the local population are made a norm, superior to the characteristics of the immigrated population(s) (SOU 2006:79: 58 ff; Kamali, 2006). While equality must be desired in integration policy, such a strategy does not enhance equality, it rather does the opposite. On the other hand, asymmetric access to society also substantiates power, whether the inequality is formally or informally practiced. Thus, inequality is not created only by the current integration regime. Kamali *et al*'s study – commissioned by the Swedish state – seems to have had little impact on integration policy or discourse, perhaps because of the complex contradiction that the very concept of integration contains: the immigrated and the local populations do not have equal access to society, but efforts to increase the immigrated's possibility to access society also reconstruct inequality.

The current integration regime appears to over-value 'diversity'. Therefore, this paper studies the integration process in a context of 'uniformity'. It studies the integration of Syrian refugees in Egypt, as the immigrated population in that case faces difficulties similar to those of immigrated populations in Europe, but there are no big differences in language, religion, 'culture', position in the global power order, etcetera. In such a context, assimilation of immigrants should not be relevant, and immigrants should not be exposed to structural power as described above.

Yet, scholars before me have studied the reception of Syrian refugees in Egypt, and a quite clear picture of poor integration, expressed as discrimination and hostility, has been drawn. Ayoub & Khallaf (2014) have conducted focus group discussions with 310 Syrian households and in-depth interviews with key persons from the Syrian community in different governorates to study their challenges in Egypt. The informants were originally well received by the Egyptians – some were even hosted in Egyptian homes for free – but the attitudes changed drastically during 2013, when the Muslim Brotherhood regime was overthrown by the army with great public support. Ayoub & Khallaf conducted interviews and focus group discussions both before and immediately after the regime shift, and noted a drastic change in the narratives of the refugees – some even reporting losing their jobs and rent contracts (p. 21). The respondents explained the attitude shift with the increasing number of Syrians arriving, the long duration of time they have stayed in Egypt, and accusations of Syrians being involved in Egyptian politics, supporting the ousted Muslim Brotherhood (p. 20). Ayoub & Khallaf's findings highlight how division can be constructed through policy and politics, and how diversity is not necessarily a precondition.

Furthermore, the knowledge of how integration works in non-western countries appears to be limited, despite the fact that most refugees do not end up in the west (UNHCR 2015b).

1.1 Research question, aim and purpose

The purpose of this paper is to further investigate the integration process, by studying integration in a context where one explaining variable – ‘diversity’ – can be counted out. By studying integration in a non-western context I aim to seek new perspectives that could solve some of the confusion that for the time being seems to limit the research field.

My research question is:

How should the integration process of Syrian refugees in Egypt be understood?

I seek to understand the integration process by identifying the obstacles for integration, and the efforts made to overcome them. I use a structure-actor model to distinguish between actors and the structures within which they act. In the following chapter I review previous findings and theoretical explanations to why immigrated members of society can be excluded from social life, economic opportunities and the political sphere. In chapter three, I present my methodological choices and the strategy for the empirical study conducted in Egypt. In the fourth chapter I present the result of the empirical study and apply the theoretical explanations on the empirical material. The fifth and last chapter serves to conclude my findings and argument.

1.1.1 Delimitations

This is a study of Syrian refugees living in Egypt. It does not examine other refugee populations in Egypt, even if other nationalities are represented among the refugee population. The Syrian refugees that I interview are their own spokespersons, and I do not review or judge Egyptian immigration or integration policy, or UNHCR’s support for refugees in Egypt, except when they are brought up by the informants. I also have limited possibility to judge whether my understanding of the integration process can be applied on a European context; I leave the European case(s) to be studied by future scholars.

2 Theory

To be able to distinguish between structures and actors, I need a theoretical framework that defines structures. It should be noted that structures are nothing but theoretical constructions. Neither the class structure, social structure or any structure at all, are ‘real’ in the meaning that they can be touched or measured (Hollis 1994). Hence, the structures outlined in this or analyzed in the following chapters, should be understood only as tools to help us understand social processes.

This chapter will also discuss the meaning of an ‘act’ and – first of all – the meaning of integration.

2.1 Integration aims at equality

There is no juridical definition to the term ‘integration’, but Crisp (2014) regards integration as “a process which leads to a durable situation for refugees”, and points out that this includes a formal process, where new-comers obtain rights and access to public institutions, as well as a social dimension, which refers to access to the social life of society. However, I find this definition insufficient, as many countries with great problems with integration probably offer a situation for refugees that is ‘durable’. In fact, refugees could face discrimination in all forms and stand outside all markets in a rich country, but still have a ‘durable situation’. Accordingly, refugees could (theoretically) be totally integrated in a poor country, and still not have a ‘durable situation’. Hopkins (2011:21) claims that “real integration equates to recapturing a level of life one enjoyed prior to flight”, a definition that makes little sense for refugees and migrants that flee poor living conditions. The aim of the integration process could not solely be a ‘durable situation’, neither recapturing the previous living standard, but for the immigrated to obtain rights and a living standard as good (or bad) as that of (other) citizens. The conclusion must be that the integration process aims at equality. Accordingly, a society characterized by inequality or discrimination towards its immigrated members has failed to fully integrate them.

2.2 Structures and actors

There is a divide within the social sciences where some see the individual as totally independent of any structural influence and others regard the individual an unfree result of her social context. However, most scholars recognize some degree of both independence and influence, and according to Lundquist (1984:1-4), both actors and the (social) structure within which they act, are necessary to study when analyzing political phenomenon. Hollis (1994:6) points out that the conflicting perspectives also regard whether “structure determine action or action determine structure?” – a question which comes down to what makes social change.

A structure-actor model is an analytical tool that recognizes both actors and structures as explaining factors to social processes, where individuals act both within, and in relation to, social structures. To be able to apply such a model to the case, I first need to identify relevant structures and acts.

Many actors can be relevant for this study, such as Syrian refugees, Egyptian citizens, refugees of other nationalities, the Egyptian state, media, charity organizations or UNHCR. In this study, the Syrian refugees are the primary focus, and the Syrian refugees are the main actors that will be examined, together with two Egyptian community workers that take action for the integration of Syrian refugees, who have also been interviewed. The policy of the Egyptian state, UNHCR, etcetera, are seen as structures. This is to limit the scope of this paper.

A structure should be understood as a social system that (unconsciously) reconstructs – and perhaps consolidates – a present state. Lundquist (1984:5) mentions three analytical structures within which social processes can be studied: social, economic and political structures, and this chapter will now outline the analytical structures that are found relevant for immigrant integration: othering is seen as a social structure, the class structure as an economic structure and citizenship as a political structure.

2.2.1 A social structure constructing a racial Other

The existing theory in the studies of integration is to a high extent based on an anthropology that views cultural manifestations as a characteristic inseparable from the individual, and social categorization on cultural basis as inevitable. Hence, diversity is a ‘problem’ in every society that allows immigration. To be able to look beyond cultural diversity as a ‘natural’ source of conflict, a perspective that sees diversity as socially constructed could be useful.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* from 1978 is one of the most famous scholarly pieces on diversity as socially constructed. Said argues that ‘the Orient’ is constructed to substantiate an opposite to ‘the Occident’; to be able to define ourselves we also have to define what we are not. In other words, ‘the Orient’ is constructed to substantiate an ‘Other’. ‘The Orient’ is as much a discursive construction as a geographical place;

the Others are presented as exotic and different, in fact even as incompatible with ‘us’ (Isin 2002; Ahmed 2006). The construction of ‘the Orient’ and a geographical otherness inevitably also constructs what Said calls ‘the Orientals’; the racial Others, who embody distance and constitutes a ‘there’, when whiteness in the Occident constitutes a ‘here’ (Ahmed 2006). Ahmed compares the social proximity that is the foundation for whiteness to the family. Parents search in their offspring not for any likeness, but for a specific likeness (“she has her father’s nose!”), that shows inheritance and belonging (2006:119-125). Similarly, color is a criteria that guarantees one’s inclusion in a social category – a ‘race’. Hence, ‘race’ is not a natural or given categorization of people, but socially constructed to impose a hierarchy. As belonging to ‘the Occident’ implies whiteness, ‘the Orient’ implies otherness. As Ahmed (2006) and many others have noted, whiteness is rather the absence of race than race, while absence of whiteness imposes race; racialization.

The constructed Other has become subjected to racism, which, according to Balibar (1991a), rather fears cultural interbreeding than racial – racism is no longer based on ‘race’. In fact, since the abolishment of colonization, the main theme is not the superiority of one group over another, but the need to separate groups “to purify the social body, to preserve ‘one’s own’ or ‘our’ identity from all forms of mixing, interbreeding or invasion” (p. 17). This sort of ‘new’ racism holds a contradiction as it on one hand is conservative and expects – and desires – cultures to be differentiated and static, but on the other expects assimilation to proceed integration for immigrated Europeans (p. 25).

In Zizek’s understanding, modern racism has gone even further; to idealize the Other. The exoticized Other is no longer a savage, but an even better person than ‘ourselves’ – someone to learn from. Already the colonial Euro centrism is based on idealizing the Other as a holder of hidden wisdom, that is available for ‘us’ to explore (McLaren 2001; Ahmed 2006).

2.2.2 The economic structure: a class-based society

Racial or ethnic othering cannot be studied without the notion of class, as Balibar (1991a), Wallerstein (1991), Ahmed (2006) and many others have pointed out. Wallerstein (1991:29-35) shows that the economic system has no drive for full integration – racism and segregation rather have a function to ensure stratification in the capitalist system and ensure a constant supply of desperate workers who accept low wages and poor working conditions, and to justify the very existence of a disadvantaged class, in contradiction to equal competition and equal rights for all. Furthermore, a system that is based on competition does not encourage solidarity. It is therefore no surprise that a racist party like the Swedish Democrats in Sweden gain much of their support from the less advantaged, such as persons with low education and income, even if their ideology lies closer to right-wing parties that usually do not enjoy support from these members of society (Holmberg 2007). When seeking for explanations to segregation, one should therefore consider the economic system as a possible factor.

As mentioned above, othering is a way to define persons who cannot be defined 'like us': the Other is both what we are not, and what we are not but *could be*, as an available extension to us. The disadvantaged Other is a resource for the advantaged (Ahmed 2006:114 ff). In fact, the historical – colonial – racism was not based on nationalism, but on classism. The very notion of race did not appear until later, and then to distinguish between servants or slaves, and aristocrats or owners. This 'class racism' was later politically challenged – especially through the claims of the French revolution – when humans were seen as born equal, rather than born unequal (Balibar, 1991b:206f). To justify inequality under such political circumstances, the political unit within which all human are equal had to be limited through citizenship (Isin 2002). Class differences were now to be understood as inequality but not as injustice.

2.2.3 Citizenship as a political structure

Bridget Anderson shows how the nation-state is a colonial construction that aims at excluding the colonized and the unwanted. Its borders are both physical, to limit a geographic space, but also metaphoric, to function “as filters, sorting out the desirable from the undesirable” (Anderson 2013:2; Vaughan-Williams 2009). Anderson (2013) understands society as a 'community of value', and its members as divided into those who share values and are either good citizens or tolerated citizens, and those who do not share values; failed citizens and non-citizens. As society is pictured as an united community, migrants (and other disadvantaged groups) are “at best contingently included, and (...) often overtly excluded.” (p. 29).

The global structure of nation-states allows people to be right-holders only in a limited geographic space, and is at the core of the problem of international migrants. According to Anderson (2013) and Isin (2002) the right to be politically active and claim rights is conditional for some members of society, such as the criminal, unemployed, and immigrated, who depend on tolerance from citizens with unconditional rights. It should be pointed out that under such circumstances, we cannot talk about unconditional rights for all, but about conditional services available to those who carry out a specific performance.

Citizenship is often translated into 'membership' in a state, and scholars debate whether it should be seen as a status or a practice, and as empowerment or domination, but all these interpretations give a limited understanding. Citizenship is a fluid concept that is enacted by “actors of citizenship [who] are not necessarily those who hold the status of citizenship. If we understand citizenship as an instituted subject-position, it can be performed or enacted by various categories of subjects (...)” (Isin 2009:370).

Isin (2002) claims that every society constructs some of its members as outsiders and Others as an inevitable condition for constructing some as an elite and a ruling class of citizens (Isin 2002:280f). There is nothing like a harmonious society, and the more any leader tries to picture it as such, the more divided we can suspect it to be (p. 29). Furthermore, the disadvantaged members of society tend to be pictured as excluded or as 'outside society', and social problems are associated with those excluded persons and not with society itself (Schinkel 2013).

Every society holds social groups, and group formations are acts of othering. This, as groups are built to contrast each other. Regardless if groups are hypothetical, thus created as a means for classification or self-definition, or real, as a result of political mobilization for a shared cause, groups constitute themselves in relation to each other (Isin 2002:25-35). In doing so, the members emphasize what is common as an act of submission to the group formation. In the case of citizens and Others, that means that citizenship can be seen as a “kind of identity (...) constitute[d] as virtuous, good, righteous, and superior, and differentiate[d] from strangers, outsiders and aliens” (Isin 2002:35f), while non-citizens are constituted as immoral, criminal, dishonest, etcetera. Such a construction serves to justify political exclusion, economic marginalization, and racism.

2.2.4 Acts for integration, acts of citizenship

Lastly, we need a definition of an act. Isin (2009:378) defines an act, unlike an action, as a doing performed by an actor, that is purposive, that aims to make a difference, that has completion, and that ends with a new act. Furthermore, acts indicate relations. Isin (2009:378 ff) refers to Reinach, who interprets acts as expressions of the need for being heard. Hence, every act is made by one or several actors, with the intention to get heard by someone else.

We also need to know what acts can be called ‘acts of citizenship’. In Isin’s words, what comes to mind is “acts as voting, taxpaying and enlisting. But these are routinized social actions that are already instituted. By contrast, acts make a difference.” (2009:379). Acts of citizenship are acts which purpose is to claim rights, as citizenship implies rights. Hannah Arendt has a similar view and sees a political being as a being capable of acting. However, the political claims to rights raised especially by undocumented migrants and refugees in Europe, have highlighted the gap between citizenship as a membership in a state, and citizenship as a claim for rights – as these claims are not for citizenship status, but ‘only’ for rights (Isin 2009:380f). Isin criticizes Žižek, who claims that non-citizens broadening the very concept of politics to something bigger when they become political, and are to be understood as revolutionary (Žižek 1999, referred to by Isin 2002:277). Isin argues that non-citizens are constructed as Others when understood as revolutionary, which serves the Occidental interest. Rather, non-citizens should be understood as a part of the political as “[t]he political is not limited to an already constituted territory or its legal ‘subjects’: it always exceeds them.” (Isin, 2009: 370).

When non-citizens act, they constitute themselves as holders of “the right to claim rights” (Isin 2009:371). With the definition of integration being equality, any act for integration becomes an act for equality. Thus, acting for integration means enacting the right to claim rights, and constructing oneself as an actor of citizenship.

3 Methodology

In the first chapter I have already briefly argued for my choice of case; the case is relevant for the theoretical problem that is studied as it is characterized by uniformity – but the case is also relevant to study in itself. First, the Syrian refugee community in Egypt is in many ways characteristic for modern refugees. Unlike a hundred years ago, most refugees today live in an urban setting and not in camps (UNHCR 2015b). Most refugees also stay in the region of their departure state, often in poor neighboring states. In this perspective, the Syrian refugees in Egypt make up a representative case for a refugee population. Second, given the size of the refugee population – 4.4 million Syrians have fled to neighboring countries since the outbreak of the war in 2011 (UNHCR 2015a) – and the unlikelihood that they will be able to return to Syria in any foreseeable future, it is also an important case to study.

3.1 A qualitative analysis of interview material

I have found a qualitative method of analysis most suitable for this study. The complex social processes that are at focus here may be active in interpersonal interactions, perhaps unconsciously, and may not be captured in surveys. A more suitable method of collection is that of in-depth interviews, which allows me to collect narratives of Syrian refugees living in Egypt. Four key persons in the Syrian community have been selected; they are community workers, volunteers in social projects and charity workers, as well as two Egyptian community workers taking action for the integration of the Syrian community. The key persons are expected to have a deeper understanding of not only their own, but also the general experience of being a Syrian refugee in Egypt, and they take action to improve the situation for the Syrians. Interviewing these actors allows me to identify both structures and acts for integration.

The informants have been introduced to topics of conversation that relate to experiences of othering, economic exploitation and political exclusion. The meetings have been rather organic and the informants have been allowed to choose where to meet, and if they want to come alone or together with someone. As a result, two interviews were made in pairs; with the Syrian community workers Rima and Said, as well as with the Egyptian community workers May and Hadeer. Two interviews were conducted individually: with Rasha, who is chairperson for a Syrian NGO, and with Hanady, who is working with children at a Syrian community center. Two of the interviews, with Rima and Said and with Hanady, were conducted in Arabic. Even

though I speak Arabic, a native speaker joined to ensure that misunderstandings were avoided. All interviews were recorded.

The analysis of the material aims at identifying experiences that conflicts or corresponds to the theoretical explanations. In accordance to the theoretical tool, the analysis has been divided into three areas: the social (othering), the economic (class) and the political.

3.1.1 Reliability of informants

The population at interest has been reached through UNHCR, which has contact with a great number of social initiatives, and which has hosted me during August and September 2015. It has been clear to the respondents that I am not a representative of UNHCR, and UNHCR has not contacted the respondents for me. I got the impression that the informants did speak freely – also when criticizing UNHCR – and I do not believe that the help of UNHCR has any implication for the reliability of the material.

When talking about the government, many of the informants have also spoken surprisingly freely. However, almost all informants explicitly thank the government for hosting them in Egypt. This repeated statement stood in bright contrast to the criticism that was expressed at other times during the interviews, and I interpret the statement as fear for the government, rather than real thankfulness. I have reasons to believe that the critique to the government is stronger than what has been outspoken. One NGO director was interviewed, but refused to answer most of my questions and refused being recorded. Hence, his statements have not been used in this study.

With this background, I have chosen only to use the informants' first names and not the names of the NGOs and centers that they work for. This is to protect their identities.

3.2 Abduction and the research process

This thesis has been written during a long period of time and it has been a fairly organic process. When formulating the research question and constructing the theoretical framework I expected that construction of diversity through othering would be the (main) reason for the Syrian refugees' difficulties to integrate in Egypt, but at an early stage of the field trip it emerged to me that that explanation was far too limited. During the first two interviews, with Hanady as well as with Rima and Said, the importance of political and economic factors was highlighted. This abduction brought a somewhat new perspective to me and led me to adjust the research design and the theoretical framework. During the interviews that were conducted later, with Rasha as well as well May and Hadeer, I adjusted my questions to what I had learned. This does not mean that those interviews are more important, but the answers fit more precisely into the theoretical context, hence these informants are more frequently quoted in the analysis.

3.3 Studying structures

Structures are theoretical constructions, and in that sense not “real”. They only exist as long as they function; at the point in history when none claims to be limited or in any sense affected by a structure, we cannot claim that it exists. As a consequence, we can only know about structures as we experience them; there is no objective way to measure or study them. With that background, my methodological position must be one of interpretation. I cannot find universal descriptions or explanations, but only seek an understanding of my material that is theoretically consistent, and in that perspective valid (Hollis 1994).

3.3.1 Context and generalizability

Much of my contribution is based on the empirical material that I have collected through interviews. My interpretation of that material is also a result of observations made during my field trip to Cairo. As will be highlighted later, the political and social climate is highly inconstant and the interpretation that I make now, as well as the material that I have collected, should be understood as a result of the context and time in which the study was made.

The findings that are highlighted in the following chapters are based on claims that have been made by several, and sometimes all, of the informants. Despite the small number of informants, the informants have often spoken not only about themselves but about Syrians around them, in general, and appeared to view themselves as spokespersons for a community. The great insight of the general situation of Syrian refugees in Egypt that the informants hold, as well as the recurrence of claims, allow me to assume that their perception of the situation is shared by others (Payne & Williams 2005). I cannot judge whether the material that I have collected in Cairo can be used to understand integration in another setting, whether at other places in Egypt, in other countries in the region, or in Europe. However, the insights that I have reached could be used as a starting point for further research on integration in any setting.

3.4 Operationalization of terms

Othering has been operationalized through discussions about the differences between Egyptians and Syrians, relation with Egyptians and other refugee communities, possibilities to have social relations with Egyptians, and treatment in public spaces and by officials. The class structure has been examined as experiences of the living standard in Egypt, Syrian refugees’ living standard compared to Egyptians’ and to other refugee communities, experiences of the labor market, experiences of the education sector, the

material needs of the community. The political has been discussed in terms of expectations on the Egyptian state, possibility to take (political) action, willingness to talk about politics and the government, self-perception of being a rights-holder in Egypt, and the consequences of political turmoil in Egypt for the community.

4 Result

Through the empirical case study, I have been able to reveal a number of factors that could explain failed integration, other than ‘diversity’. This chapter will present the result of the empirical study, divided into three sections analyzing three aspects of integration: social, economic and political integration. Every section first examines the narratives about the social, economic or political structures. Second, every section examines acts of social, economic and political integration.

4.1 Social integration or othering?

Unlike what I had first expected, none of the Syrian refugees that I have interviewed have reported hostility or discrimination in their relations with Egyptian citizens, and none thought that they were socially excluded or alienated. When asked what the relations with the Egyptian public are like, Rima and Said answered shortly: “Good” and “no, no, that is fine - they love us. I mean, they Egyptian people love the Syrians.” Only the Egyptian community workers May and Hadeer saw social exclusion as a factor in the poor integration of the Syrian refugees, and reported what can be interpreted as difference making through othering. May gave an example:

You find all those posts on Facebook: ‘I’ve had this Syrian carpenter come working for me and he was amazingly hard working and his work has incredible. He was much, much better than Egyptian carpenters. Why can’t Egyptian carpenters be as good as Syrian carpenters?’ (...) that comparison: Syrian wives are so amazing, they are so beautiful, they are so... what?! Who you antagonizing – Egyptian carpenters and Egyptian wives and whatever?

What May talked about is at the core of othering. The characteristics of a person from Syria is interpreted as a *Syrian* characteristic, when it could be more reasonable to understand it as a characteristic of carpenters from a certain business or with a certain technique of carpeting. In this case, othering does not have racist tendencies in Balibar’s understanding; it does not necessarily seek to ‘purify’ one perceived group and it does not impose hierarchy – at least not in the favor of the local population. Rather, it idealizes the Other, as claimed by Žižek (McLaren, 2001), possibly, to justify their exploitation. Othering also appears to function as a way to define another. The informants experienced being perceived as belonging to a Syrian group, and they also defined others as either included or excluded from group. Hanady was keen to point out that “I am *Syrian*, [even if] I speak very good Egyptian”. Despite being careful to

categorize people into the right national group, none of the informants were able to tell the difference between Syrians and Egyptians, when asked.

This is not without complication. First, group formation in itself is an act of othering, as the group members emphasize the common and thus the difference between members and non-members (Isin 2002). Second, if we define each other as members of a perceived group, the perceived (or even expected) characteristics of that group are translated into the characteristics of every member of that group. Just as Entzinger (2014) means that multiculturalist policies tend to accept inequality translated into ‘culture’, othering as a way of definition could possibly function to justify inequality and difference in opportunities, interpreted as the Other’s way of life. That the Syrian carpenter in May’s example was so hard working could be understood as an expression of their culture, but could also be a result of poverty and desperation to find work.

Third, if all Syrians are grouped together, what are the implications for security or solidarity? When May was asked about her vision for the Syrian refugees in Egypt she put her hopes to “internal mobilization and the support system internally” and hoped “that this becomes another layer of support as the [Syrians] who started and are doing OK or very well, that they can start and support [other Syrians]”. In the long run, such a separate support system would imply something like a social apartheid state. In fact, this is what the situation is heading towards in many sectors: there are “Syrian” neighborhoods such as “Little Damascus”, Syrian schools and Syrian community centers.

It appears that othering is not only imposed on the subject, but could also be enacted by oneself, as seen in a reference to sexual harassment made by May. Harassment is a problem for all girls in Egypt, but when a Syrian girl becomes a victim to sexual harassment it is interpreted as harassment towards the Syrian community, and “when you come to a new country, and then this happens and you’re already vulnerable, you don’t feel you’re home” (May).

4.1.1 Struggling for integration, acting for othering

Othering through difference making and group formation appears to be active not only in the narratives of the informants, but also in the acts they take in their daily lives and in their struggle for integration. None of the informants expressed any interest in socially integrating, despite reporting no bad experiences of the Egyptian public. Rima and Said spoke positively about the café they had chosen as a meeting point, as a place that gathered almost only Syrians. None of the Syrians that I spoke to ran any projects that aimed at bringing the two nationalities closer. When Hanady, who is responsible for activities for children in a community center, was asked if she targeted only Syrian or also children of other nationalities, she simply answered that “we don’t have a problem [if children of other nationalities want to join us]”. When informants were asked if they wanted to become Egyptian and gain Egyptian nationality in case they had to stay in Egypt for long, only Rasha took the question seriously. Hanady seemed offended by the question, then said “residency would be great, but nationality?”, and

laughed. A possible explanation is that the Syrian community is big enough to support itself, and perhaps the community expects their stay in Egypt to be temporary; there is no 'need' to socially integrate with the Egyptians.

May and Hadeer were the only informants that actively worked for social integration, by bringing Syrian and Egyptian children together and educating them about their shared cultural heritage "to address issues of alienation (...) and accepting the other, on both sides" (May), though they were only doing so after being contracted by UNHCR.

It should be pointed out that the small interest in social integration is not necessarily a reflection of an unwillingness to socially integrate, but a reflection of a more pragmatic strategy. I asked Hanady if the goal of the program for children was that they would be able to enter the Egyptian education system, or if they were to receive separate education with a Syrian curriculum, and she answered:

We have two goals: First, to address special need that the children have because of what they have went through, but secondly, we live in Egypt so of course we have to prepare the child to live in the situation where he is. It doesn't work that we are left behind for all our lives.

Also May, who works with social integration only, believed that social integration is not the most urgent need of the Syrian refugees in Egypt:

[Some refugees have] a direr situation, do you really want to go to talk with them about history, or just fulfill their basic needs?

It appears that othering is active both through difference making and through group formation. The Syrian group is both what Isin (2002) calls a hypothetical group, as it is constructed to define oneself and another, but it is also a real group, that serves to address shared problems and needs specific to its members.

4.2 Integration and the class structure

The Syrians that flew to Egypt during the first years of the Syrian crisis were relatively well off. Unlike the Syrians in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, they arrived by airplane, had passports, and some opened shops, restaurants and businesses. A walk through downtown or any of the better-off neighborhoods of Cairo gives the impression that Syrian shops pop up as mushroom – and they are doing well. However, statistics of the socio-economic situation of the Syrian refugees registered by UNHCR gives a different picture. 70 % of the 200 000 registered Syrian refugees were surveyed, and 87 % were found to survive with less than 592 Egyptian pounds (approximately 66 Euro) per month, which is the minimum expenditure basket for Egypt, and 60 % survived with less than half that sum (Tan, 2015). All informants in this study have also reported that poverty is one of their biggest problem, along with the lack of work permits, which leads to poverty. However, the information about the poverty of the

Syrian refugees has not reached the Egyptian public, and the community worker May sees both advantages and disadvantages: while the Syrians could have received more support if people were more aware of their actual situation, the Egyptians would also have felt more competition over resources if they were aware of the Syrians' needs.

In my conversation with Rasha, who runs an NGO, the shock of moving to Egypt appeared to be not a culture shock but a class shock: "Syrians who were not initially poor got to stay in poor areas"; "they were out of their place". Their new living situation offered a new lifestyle – especially for the women, who "do not work in Syria (...) so they are provided with everything". Rasha described a life with drivers, service delivery and servants, similar to that of high class Egyptians. But "life in Egypt is harsh, it's different. Women work here, women do lots of things here. They are like fighters. You know, Syrian women are not, and they have lots of family. Now, the woman has to go out and work". The conflict appeared between high-class Syrians and lower-class Egyptians and appears to me as a class conflict, but is interpreted by the community as a cultural difference. According to Rasha, the Syrians that have ended up in poor neighborhoods complain about harassment, but none of the informants that I have met (and that live in neighborhoods that reflect their class background) have made such complaints. However, it lies outside the scope of this paper to speculate as to the possible integration of Syrians from working-class backgrounds.

Another shock, which was brought up by both May and Rima, is that of the poor services offered in the Egyptian public sector.

4.2.1 Integrating into the 'right' class

When talking about poverty, all the informants have been well aware that their expectation is to be better off than most Egyptians, and much better off than refugees of other nationalities in Egypt. Despite the reported harassment of Syrians in poorer areas, the reluctance also appears among the Syrians. They are, again according to Rasha, "out of their place". Rasha's NGO has therefore run a project that consisted of paying the rents of Syrian families living in the very poor area Masaken Othman, to allow them to move to richer but more expensive areas. When I asked why she made no attempt to improve the area as a whole and help also Egyptian residents, she answered that she did not consider herself responsible for them, as "for the Egyptians, this is their environment, their community". The complaints over economic problems were not about being too poor, but about being poorer than one *should be*; only May and Hadeer were critical of economic inequality, all other informants were critical of economic injustice – and the poverty of some was considered just. The struggle for economic integration did not aim at erasing class differences, but to integrate into one's 'right' class – which indicates that there is something like a 'right' class.

Both Rasha and Rima were running trainings to provide Syrians with skills that would make them more attractive to the labor market, but none of them thought that this was a real solution to the Syrians' economic problems, it could only help some to get underqualified jobs and a basic income to survive with. The solution that they really needed was work permits that would allow stable employment in their fields of

expertise. In the absence of such, they depend on informal and underqualified jobs. UNHCR has also found that an increasing number of Syrian refugees in Egypt use 'negative coping strategies' such as begging, illegal, exploitative or dangerous labor, and forced early marriage (Tan, 2015). According to Wallerstein (1991), the economic system pushes the immigrated to poverty, because it needs a supply of people that are desperate enough to take jobs that none else wants, perhaps because they have a poor background, no education, etcetera. In this case, that explanation has limited validity as the supply of desperate workers in Egypt is almost endless. The exclusion from the labor market is not a result of the market or the refugees' inability to compete with the local labor force, but of political reform that does not allow work permits for refugees.

4.3 Integration and the political

When talking about integration into the political, it appears that the integration into the different spheres are closely linked together. When asked about their visions for the Syrian community, all informants wished for work permits. All informants also reported great frustration over the temporary residence permits that have to be renewed every six months, a process that takes two month, and hence has to be started anew every four months. Constantly applying for new visas gives a feeling of uncertainty and makes it difficult to settle down and feel secure; both Rasha and Rima claimed that Egypt is a transit country for refugees. According to Zohry (2003) Egypt is, historically, not a receiving but rather a sending state of migrants, and the Egyptian policy on border control and migration management is shaped by these characteristics. As an example, entry visas are easy to obtain upon arrival on the border, but permission from the army is required (for men) to leave the country (Middle East Institute 2010). After the regime shift in 2013, the immigration policy changed, and there is now an entry visa requirement for Syrians, but many still get arrested and detained for trying to depart irregularly (Smith 2015).

All informants have differentiated between the Syrians' situation before and after the regime shift from the 30th of June 2013. The overthrown government of the Muslim Brotherhood had expressed great support for the Syrian opposition and some Syrian refugees were thought to support the Muslim Brotherhood. After the regime shift, a negative media rhetoric including hate speech and threats targeted at not only the Muslim Brotherhood, but also the whole Syrian refugee community (Ayoub & Khallaf 2014:21). None of the informants of this study reported as harsh conditions as were described by Ayoub & Khallaf, who found that the refugees faced hostility in all contact with the Egyptian society after the 30th of June, including inter-personal relations with Egyptians. However, when the immigration policy was replaced together with the political leaders, the atmosphere changed. Said tells:

During Mohamed Morsi's time there was a lot of help and money from the Egyptians. (...) After the Egyptians made him leave and fought the Brotherhood

and prisoned the communities that were affiliated with the Brotherhood, the help stopped. But what did the Syrians do for the help to stop?

Despite the relations with the public that seem to have returned to normal, the informants have brought up three lasting effects of the 30th of June crisis: First, the government forcibly closed many of the NGOs working for Syrians, and thereby removed much of their support system and left them even more vulnerable. Second, the visa requirements made it impossible to come to Egypt legally. The Syrians that continue to arrive in Egypt, travel via Sudan and enter illegally. Hence, they stay in Egypt without residency permits and without rights. Visa requirements also make it difficult to reunite families that were separated before 30th of June. Third, most informants have reported a feeling of unsafety due to the unstable political situation, which pushes many to try to depart irregularly from Egypt (Rollins 2014), as explained by Rasha:

They always expect that you know to be thrown out or put in jail because of the unstable economic (...) and political climate in Egypt. (...) They are not safe. The Egyptians are leaving. [The Syrians] came into a political issue, [and] the Egyptians themselves are not staying [in Egypt].

Much of the political instability has nothing to do with immigration, but with the power struggle between the government and the ousted. Immigration policy is rather a way for the military leadership to raise its profile, as different as possible from the ousted. To construct a common enemy – strangers, outsiders, terrorists – is also a way to unite the population, especially in times of crisis and conflict (Isin 2002:29). The overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood regime that gained massive public support, revealed the political instability and changeability of the public support. The perception of the Syrian refugees has changed from that of guests, to that of criminals, aliens and enemies. In Anderson's (2013) terms, the Syrians were excluded from the (perceived) community of values, but not necessarily because *they* changed, but because the values changed.

The feeling of unsafety is also reflected in the expectations and/or experiences of public officials. Rima says:

If I have all my papers in order, and my residence permit, and a police officer stopped me – he will finish with me quickly, like this: [clapping hands, as if removing dust]. (...) There are no rights, no rights for the Syrians – ever.

It appears strange that the relation with the general public is positive or at least neutral, while the representatives of the government are perceived so negatively. Why is that? The continued conversation gives a lead:

Rima: "Here, they don't deal with Syrians as if they were humans."

Said: "They don't deal with the [Egyptian] people as if they were humans!"
[Laughs]

After some conversation, it appears that the informants are aware that all what they suffer from is not targeted towards them as Syrians, but that nearly all people in Egypt

suffer from oppression, poverty and other hardship. Their claim is not about a poor reception of refugees, but about a poorly managed state in general.

The informants reported being disappointed because they expected to improve their lives, or at least to keep their previous standard of living, and they are not able to do so partly because they have limited rights as refugees, but also because opportunities and living standard are poorer in Egypt than in Syria. Zizek (2015) makes a similar conclusion about the refugees in Europe: “one can observe here the paradox of utopia: precisely when people find themselves in poverty, distress and danger, and one would expect that they would be satisfied by a minimum of safety and well-being, the absolute utopia explodes.”

4.3.1 Acts of citizenship

In the light of the reasoning about assimilation earlier, one can expect that refugees that get engaged in local affairs and politics would be better integrated than others, but Syrian refugees in Egypt seem to face much of their problems *because of* refugees' engagement in what is considered 'Egyptian affairs' (Marroushi 2013; Ayoub & Khallaf 2014). None of the Syrians that I have spoken with have expressed any political preferences, but they were well aware of the rumors about the community's affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, and there seem to be a consensus about this explanation to the sudden hostility towards them. It has also been clear to them that it is impossible to take political action, unless it directly relates to their own needs as Syrian refugees.

Given the political situation in Egypt, it is understandable that none have criticized the government during the interviews. However, I have felt the frustration over the little support from the government, and the closing down NGOs and charities, expressed in body language or 'between the lines'. Even if much of the (direct) complaints have been about UNHCR or nonprofit organizations, most of the informants to this study have (indirectly) questioned what society they are trying to integrate into, and it is clear that their vision is not only to live as well as the Egyptians do, but to create, or find, a much better society. That they romanticize Syria, and the life they believe that they could have lived elsewhere, appears to play a role in shaping their expectations.

The informants have differentiated between the needs of Egyptians, which they perceive as the responsibility of the government, and the needs of the Syrians, which they regard as their own responsibility as NGO- and community workers. Caring for the protection of the 'own' community is a logical consequence of their expectations, and it is also a political act. When society claims no responsibility, the informants have felt a responsibility to provide themselves with rights. As explained in the theoretical frame work, to ask for a right is also a right. Acting for integration and improving ones rights is also a way to constitute oneself as a rights-holder, which, according to Isin (2002) is to constitute oneself as an (informal) citizen. In the absence of formal rights, the Syrians in Egypt provide themselves with rights: the absence of work permits does not stop them from working informally, poor education services does not stop them from educating their own children, and strict emigration policy does not stop them

from trying to depart illegally. Such acts, that deliberately break the rules but (indirectly) aim at changing the rules, are acts of citizenship.

In my conversation with Rasha it became clear that she was aware of, and actively considering, the potential political consequences of her work; she recalled a conversation with a friend, also a community worker, who argued that the charity should stop working in order to push the government to take responsibility and support the refugees. Rasha had answered that not only the refugees, but the whole country survives because of charity. Closing down the center would change nothing but the lives of the refugees, and their ability to act. Her statement shows both that she expects nothing from the government, and that there is an underlying political ambition in her work.

The Egyptian informants – May and Hadeer – had a more ideological approach to migration. They were critical to the class structure as well as the idea of nations, states and borders. Instead of seeing the Syrians as aliens, they taught the children about a borderless world and one united humanity.

5 Conclusions

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, I have sought to understand the integration process by identifying the obstacles for integration, and the efforts made to overcome them. I have used a structure-actor model to distinguish between actors and the structures within which they act, and with the help of the empirical study I have been able to identify three discriminatory structures that push for inequality. The social structure constructs the immigrated as Others and strangers, not welcome and not 'home' in the receiving society, but the explanation that I expected to find appeared to have limited relevance. Othering alone cannot explain why the Syrians refugees are poorly integrated in Egypt, but it runs like a thread through the whole analysis. The informants experienced being pushed down the social ladder, but as some of the Syrian refugees in Egypt are successful and rich (and those Syrians are more visible), the general expectation is that *all* Syrians are rich. The political climate that is hostile towards the Syrian refugees targeted them as a group and not as individuals, regardless of their political activities or preferences. The informants also perceived problems in their new society as specific to them; a problem like sexual harassment – that all women in Egypt suffer from – was perceived as an attack on the refugee community and made the Syrian refugees feel unwelcome and pushed away. The acts that the informants took towards integration were also acts of othering. Social support and services were offered by Syrian refugees to other Syrian refugees, and the community was separated from the Egyptian public. The informants both experienced alienation and alienated themselves from the Egyptians.

I have found conflicting positions between the immigrated and the society they try to integrate into; the immigrated act for integration but the society has a drive for segregation. With this perspective, we need a new vocabulary of integration. So, how should the integration of the Syrian refugees in Egypt be understood? I suggest that the integration process should be understood as political struggle for rights.

5.1 Integration as a political struggle for rights

When integration is defined as equality, any act for integration becomes an act for equality. Calling for integration means calling for improved opportunities and better living standard for the underprivileged. Hence, integration should be understood as a political struggle. Furthermore, when acting (politically), one expresses a need for being heard. When an immigrated member of society asks to be heard, s/he makes a democratic request. Calling for change and asking to be heard means enacting 'the

right to have rights'. Hence, integration should be understood as a political struggle for rights.

Accordingly, integration does not necessarily imply thankfulness or admiration to the society one struggles to integrate into. On the contrary, the political struggle that the integration process makes up, could possibly give rise to further critique. The integration act is a critical practice.

However, acting for equality does not necessarily imply having an ideology that goes against any inequality. As noted earlier, in reference to Wallerstein (1991), the economic system has no drive for full integration as it does not have a drive for equality, and it is somewhat misleading to talk about integrating into a system that per definition is disintegrated. Economic integration does not necessarily aim at equality but rather at justice. When claiming that the immigrated become low-class because of injustice, one also recognizes the class structure and the poverty of some (other) poor as just. This was expressed by the informants as a will to integrate in their 'right' class, and an indifference towards poverty that was seen as just – which indicates that there is a 'right' class. Class difference was not seen as unjust economic inequality, and accordingly, sexual harassment was not understood as unjust gender oppression.

5.2 Structures, actors and the freedom of human

Acts take place within structures, and structures shape acts; the social structure that divides people into groups, shapes social action to appear within the constructed group. On the other hand, acts also shape structures. The informants were restricted from engaging in 'Egyptian affairs', but they also constructed themselves as responsible only for other Syrians, and did not take action for Egyptians who had similar problems as themselves.

In an earlier chapter I referred to Hollis (1994), who questioned whether acts shape structures or structures shape acts, which comes down to whether human is free and able to carry out social change, or not. From my perspective, they are interrelated and reconstruct each other, often unconsciously, and perhaps in spite of the actors' intentions. This was apparent when the informants talked about their social lives that were isolated from that of Egyptians, which possibly had consequences also for their access to other parts of society. To make possible social change through social action, perhaps actors must be conscious of the structures.

5.3 Managing diversity has nothing to do with integration

As outlined in the introduction, the preposition of the current integrations regime is that integration is a natural process that happens by itself, if the population is uniform. I have reasons to challenge that conclusion.

Firstly, assimilation does not necessarily lead to integration. The difference between Syrians and Egyptians was not at all about culture; none of the informants could tell what the (cultural) difference between Syrians and Egyptians was. Despite this, the informants defined themselves, and experienced being defined by others, by their nationality. The construction of a Syrian refugee community was both practical, around a shared cause to support the community, and symbolic, as a way to define each other. When some refugees became (too) engaged in ‘Egyptian affairs’, the defining border was removed and the support to the community stopped. It is not at all given that adjusting to the local population makes integration easier, even the opposite could be true. It appears like assimilation is not demanded when it is possible, or not ‘needed’. But in a context where skin color, language skills or religion can still function as defining characteristics, assimilation can be requested. Though, it should not be understood as a real wish for uniformity, but a strategy to create a desirable white norm and a second class that will never succeed to fulfill that norm. The critical response to the western demand on impossible assimilation has become to act as if assimilation has worked; the white anti-racism movement rewards the racialized by not ‘seeing’ skin color – a strategy that confirms that the white norm is desirable.

Second, my findings also give me reasons to claim that integration should not be understood as a ‘natural’ process. What happens ‘naturally’ is rather the opposite: segregation. The prevalent perspective appears to give a limited understanding of the integration process. By focusing on ‘cultural’ diversity, the social structure is active, but not necessarily challenged. As already found by Kamali *et al* (2006), the integration policy that focuses on ‘culture’ possibly even preserves the social structure, while the economic and political structures are not noticed. By admitting the discriminatory structures that are active in society, they integration policy could possibly move more actively towards equality.

When talking about integration policy, one should consider contextual differences. Most research on integration appears to be conducted in a western context, but this study clearly shows that prevalent theoretical findings are not always applicable on another context. As an example, previous research appears to assume that the immigrated has a poorer background than the population of the receiving state, and that the receiving state is a rich democracy. Hence, the immigrated make up a ‘natural’ under-class, and the local population a ruling class. On the contrary, most of the world’s refugees end up in poor and undemocratic countries in the region of their origin, and we know little about how their integration does – and could – work.

6 Resources

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