

The No-Power Expressions: The impact of Refugees' (Im-)Material Culture on Decoding the Urban Image of Alexandria

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Abstract: “The elephant in the room” states Robert Chambers [1] to address “Power”; a standpoint matching Foucault’s hypothesis: “power is everywhere” [2-9]. Chambers emphasizes the “convening” power type: “power to empowerment” [1]— a contribution to the four previously established ones: power “over”, “to”, “with” and “within” [10].

All five provide an understanding of the power discourse, especially regarding impact on the society material culture and the city urban image — that is, however, a top-down approach taking a hierarchical powerful-powerless orientation. In contrast, the paper tackles the topic by undertaking an opposite bottom-up/powerless-powerful perspective. It investigates the “no-power expressions” of refugees in Alexandria, Egypt, in order to question the impact of their immaterial culture on the material one of the host society.

To methodologically understand the target group, ethnographic expert, focused and narrative “episode interviews” have been conducted [11]. Alexandria is the case study and two of the researchers’ hometown, which allows following the “participant observation” process. The abovementioned power types have been considered to discover not only the refugees’ nonphysical public, private and intimate realms of (no-)power expressions [10] but also their influence on the production of the coded material urban image of the city; according to Eco [12,13].

Key words: power expression, material culture, forced migration/integration

1. Introduction

Officially, the Egyptian government has power over refugees residing its land. The former has obligations towards the latter because Egypt has signed not only the 1951 convention, in addition to its 1967 protocol in 1981, but also the OAU-Organization of African Unity — convention of 1969 in 1980. However, on ground the applied measures are disintegrative rather than integrative — the reason behind the taking over of all its responsibilities in that regard by the UNHCR-

Regional-Representative-Egypt, in accordance with the 1954 MOU-Memorandum of Understanding [14]. One of the challenges facing the government is the Egyptian coherent urban pattern. The latter contains no refugee camps. Instead, it offers a diversified built environment as a melting pot that embraces Egyptians, foreigners, migrants, and refugees. Since January 2018, almost 128.000 Syrian asylum seekers have registered in Egypt, a peak record according to the “Monthly Statistical Report” of The “United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Egypt” [15]. This influx has generated a dilemma which transforms the Egyptian mixed “urban fabric” to an open “urban refuge” [16].

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Who has the power, as well as the right to protect? Yes, the state owns the power, especially the power “over”. However, Chambers [1] explains that the state also has the “power to empower”. The latter one enables the citizen to confidently practice the power “to”, “with”, and “within”. This approach can potentially limit the governmental control, in favour of transferring power to civic society through “local urban authorities” [17]. Likewise, it gives more “sovereignty” to the people, especially in terms of practicing their own internal protection right apart from the official imposed outside control powers — a perspective that goes hand in hand with the UN endorsement of re-considering the protection tactics taking pace in regimes and states where human rights are not respected [19].

The French scholar Le Gals [20] argues that governance provides function and action suggestions, without forcing uniformity, rationality, or standardization — Alike does “Urban governance”. It applies diversity and flexibility in the organization of services. That is in addition to taking into account the urban factors variety, as well as the complexity of new consumers and citizens. “Urban governance” supports the pragmatic shift towards grasping efficient local democracy [21].

This paper investigates the feasibility of applying the abovementioned three notions of power to empower, sovereignty and governance in Egypt. That is within the context of Syrian refugees, and their impact on the space use and image in Alexandria.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Terminologies

The term “power” includes different sorts of powers; power “over, to, with, within”. The first one, power “over”, we normally see it exemplified by the government of the state, the upper hand. Second, “to”, it is the ability to decide what to do and to do it. Third “with”, which is a collective way of power. Last but not least, the fourth type, power “within”, it is the power

inside and within the person, the individual self-confidence in action. Yet, there is a fifth type of power that has emerged recently, the “power to empower”. This type is used in communities that have power but want to transfer it to its citizens [1].

The “material culture” consists of all physical objects, resources, and spaces that are essential to define an explicit culture, such as houses, districts, cities, goods, products and clothes, even education, religious and administration buildings could be all types of material culture. They are perceived as symbols conveying specific meanings which exclusively characterize the society they are deriving from. Thus, the “material culture” is not isolated from society. Indeed, it deeply reflects the non-material dimension of society, such as regarding religion, values, beliefs, norms, morals, ethics and all nonphysical ideas [22-25].

Nevertheless, the term “governance”, refers to a self-structured system, in the “formal” as well as the “informal” institutions [17]. Based on the UNDP-United Nations Development Program: “governance is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes, and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences” [26]. Accordingly, the “modes of governance”, Hanafi [17] stated that the modes of governance “refers to how an urban refuge is managed, in terms of its relationship with the legal authorities and local municipalities of the host country. It indicates the relationship between the internal groups of refugees within the urban refuge, especially regarding conflict resolution for everyday problems. Therefore, it is not about the political representation of the refugees, but rather about the administrative representation” [18].

2.2 State of the Art — Target Group

Although some of the Syrian refugees have

developed a sense of self-clustering, the large majority are still in resistance [16]. That is because of the complexity of the refugees' dynamic in the Egyptian urban context. On one hand, the refugees are keen to keep the socio-political description of their spaces as an "emergency" community, which implies that the space is mainly populated by forced migration communities. The aim of this specification is to maintain the refugees' right to the city, their "New Home". Yet, on the other hand, with this approach, the refugees are strongly denouncing the transformation of the host urban refuge from being a "temporary space" of residence to a "permanent space" without any clear mode of governance [17]. This contradiction of political space with permanent settings raises concerns over the types of governance, sovereignty, and power that may ensure. For instance, it is unknown to which extent the authority, humanitarian organizations and local communities are involved. Who has the power? How the upper, as more powerful can empower the lower? Is it easy to govern an urban refuge and what if that particular emergency situation of the Syrian refugees has been drawn out for over 10 years?

Globally, concerning the "Power" discourse, in 2002 Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller discussed "power" not only as a form of authority, control, and domination but also as a way that people can see themselves from a right and capability base perspective. This was covered in their book "A New Weave of Power, People, and Politics: The action guide for advocacy and citizen participation". Likewise, did Robert Chambers in a short video, in the Plan International 2013 titled: "one of the driving forces behind the growth of participatory methods — Power: the elephant in the room". In which he declared the "power to empower" approach, that defined the empowerment strategy but from a powerful to powerless orientation. Also Henri Lefebvre, in 1996, in his book "Writing on cities". He studied the individual's right to the city. Lefebvre described the radical vision for a city; in which users, local citizens,

and immigrants, manage urban space for themselves, beyond the control of both the state and authority. He defined the right to the city as a right of no exclusion of urban society from the qualities and benefits of urban life; thus, this vision can guide inspiration for both refugees and urban refugees as well.

Locally, review the existing scientific works on hosting Syrian refugees in Egypt, most of the researches are analyzing and documenting the refugees' conditions in the host societies. For instance, Nadine Elshokeiry, in 2016, in the working paper "Egypt's Post-2012 Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Theoretical Critique of Practical Approaches", she studied the development of refugees in Egypt, in addition to the recent Egyptian governmental' actions towards the Syrian refugees' file in the post-revolution/coup context of 2013. Similarly did Maysa Ayoub and Shaden Khallaf in 2014. They analysed the urban refugee phenomenon by investigating the refugees' legal rights, livelihoods, and economic activities. That was also by tackling the Syrians issues of protection in the post-revolution period. In the article "Syrian Refugees in Egypt: Challenges of a Politically Changing Environment". Alike did Susan M. Akram, Sarah Bidinger, Aaron Lang, Danielle Hites, Yoana Kuzmova and Elena Nouredine, in 2015, the "Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility Sharing" report, in which they have suggested an action comprehensive plan for the crisis of the Syrian refugees. That was not just with the focus on Egypt but also Jordan, Lebanon, and turkey.

Accordingly, there is a lack of researches examining the conditions of the Syrian refugees in Alexandria, Egypt's second capital. The topic of Syrian refugees has been tackled by either focusing on Cairo, the capital or by studying the 6th of October city where the highest Syrian concentration is found. Very few of the previous studies did approach the topic of Syrian refugees in Alexandria, especially with regard to power and right to the city discourses. The refugees' daily life

interactions with society and challenges in the city are unknown, including material expressions, market integration, and societal abuses. It is unclear what integration abilities the Syrian refugees do have, both at the market and societal levels. The for-mentioned research gaps necessitate finding an approach to study the circumstances of the Syrian refugees within the Alexandrian urban refuge-context. That is to figure out their actual conditions and impact on society as well as on the urban fabric. Thus, the paper investigates the "Urban Refuge" phenomenon in Alexandria, with a particular focus on the Syrian refugees as the target group of the research.

2.3 Research Questions and Methodology

The paper highlights the need to re-think governance. According to Michel Foucault's perspective governance is "how we think about governing others and ourselves within a variety of context" [26]. Furthermore, based on Hanafi [17], Chambers' approach of "governmentalities" give us the chance and the toll of re-thinking "power" as something distributed, bottom-up/ powerless-powerful orientation, rather than wield from above, top-down approach/powerful-powerless perspective.

The study descriptively questions the relationship between power, governance, and space in the Alexandrian urban refuges, especially within the current Syrian refugee context. It focuses on the specificity of the political character of the urban refuges and the importance of the Syrians as a social force. How are the modes of governance (exclusion/control; top-down approach vs inclusion/ survive; bottom-up approach) negotiated inside the urban refuges? How do the Syrian refugees perceive their everyday life experiences? What are their im-material impacts (no-power expressions) on the host society? Are they affected by "the Alexandrian urban fabric", and up to which extent they can contribute to its further urban development? These are the gaps that the paper aims to negotiate.

To methodologically understand the circumstances of the Syrian refugees as a target group, expert, focused and narrative "episode interviews" have been conducted [11]. In Alexandria the researchers can deeply cover the topic via accessing data, using private networks and understanding the on-ground challenges, as it is both researchers' hometown. Direct observation, participation, and activities with the humanitarian organization opened the door to the authors to interact with Syrian refugees' communities from different backgrounds, gender, and origins. The interview partners' ages are between 30 and 45, with few exceptions for some elderly and youth interview partners. They are not only refugees but also local authority members, citizens, and volunteers.

This research is an "ethnographic" study. It tries to understand the socio-symbolic meanings of the urban pattern — depending on the "cause" and "effect" relationship [27]. According to Robert K. Yin, the case study approach is an empirical study "that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" [28]. The ethnographic approach relies on participant observation. That is in order to be socially and physically immersed in the case, as well as to accumulate local knowledge for gathering reliable data [27].

The case of analysis in this research is the Alexandrian urban refuges. Three "Urban Refuge" cases have been analyzed: "El-Asafra, Sidi Becher", "Al-Nkhel, El-Agamy" and "New Borg El-Arab". Each possesses dissimilar governance and power typologies. However, thanks to these distinctions, it is possible to analyze the mainstream of refugees' material impact on the city urban image. As in the three districts, the refugees have created material expressions underlining their existence and integration strategies.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Alexandria, Urban "Governance" and "Power"

This part provides a contextual background on the development of the refugees' circumstances in Egypt, especially in Alexandria. It aims at underling the refugees' interaction with the society and in the city, in order to unveil the urban "Governance" and "Power" in Alexandria — that is via investigating the following dimensions: the socio-political changes in Egypt, the humanitarian aid efforts, and the refugees' clustering districts in the city.

3.1.1 The Socio-Political Changes: Inclusion vs. Exclusion

During the last seven years, Egypt witnessed complicated socio-political changes and severe power transition phases. Although as mentioned earlier, the signed 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and the 1927 Protocol on the Status of Refugees both provide a legal framework of powers and responsibilities for the host country "Egypt", on-ground the situation is much more diverse. The Egyptian governance practices are "informal" and inconsistent from urban refuge to another, instead of one "sovereignty", it is multiple-layers. The urban refugees are controlled through General Administration/governments, humanitarian assistance, and local communities — each force varies in importance and responsibility. As a result, there is a constant shifting of power between the aforementioned groups which had a direct impact on the structure of the urban refugee local governance [17].

On one hand, according to Shahine [29], before July 2013, thousands of Syrians flee to Egypt. Entry visas and residency permits for Syrian to stay in Egypt were not required. Like Egyptian, Syrian refugees enjoyed free access to public facilities, such as education and healthcare. Yet, by applying Ong's definition of sovereignty as a flexible since of globalization, he stated that "even as the state maintains control over its territory, it is also willing in some cases to let corporate

entities set terms for constituting and regulating some domains while weaker and less desirable groups are given over to the regulation of supranational entities." [30]. This means that it is not only the state who has power but also the "inclusion" of refugees, supranational entities and local actors, give them the chance to take power/control over the space, to be empowered. Thus it is obvious that before July 2013, the Syrian refugees were empowered by the government. That was also confirmed during a personal interview with a Syrian refugee, a master student in Islamic economic studies in Alexandria stated:

"We felt 'home', there was no ethical restrictions. We were treated like Egyptians in terms of services and facilities. That is in addition to having more or less the same language, norms, and traditions. All these benefits offered us the feeling of security and inclusiveness." he explained.

On the other hand, since July 2013 the Syrian socio-political situation has changed, as well as the rules — a transformation of power, from power "to empower" to power "over". The Egyptian borders have been closed. Syrians are required to obtain Entry visas, residency permits, and security clearness in order to enter and stay in Egypt. These strict regulations have been temporarily set, as several Syrians participated in demonstrations, protests, and violence against the current regime. However, these policies let the Syrian refugees to feel not any more secure and settled in Egypt, a feeling of "exclusion". They became afraid of the unknown future [29].

As a result, the Egyptian urban environment became so destructive that the Syrian refugees have been frequently exposed to verbal threats, insults, and aggressions. Many Syrians were spontaneously arrested, detained and deported, because of having invalid residencies. Others are under strict surveillance [31]. The latter separated families, as family reunion turned out to be impossible — not merely tough. Even opening bank accounts to Syrians as well as registering

their businesses were hindered. This should run under the umbrella of an Egyptian entrepreneur [29]. Moreover, the work permits turned to be issued only for those who have residential permits. Many refugees are stuck. They have no survival solution. Thus, they were accepting no-qualification-jobs at the black market: street vending, construction work or cleaning and domestic work — that is, in addition, to be forced for accepting being exploited by employers [32]. As explained by Ibrahim, a Syrian refugee, in a personal communication on 28 April 2018:

“We are so tired. Life is becoming more and more difficult. The Egyptians are no more tolerant. That welcoming atmosphere turned into a nightmare, a feeling of exclusion and isolation. Our ability to find support is being complicated, even the local committee members are being corrupt or just ‘looking out for themselves’. Sometimes we just think of leaving, to cross the Mediterranean sea to reach Europe”.

3.1.2 Humanitarian Assistance: Control/Back to Inclusion

Refugees are mostly under the power and governance of the host country-municipality and Humanitarian organizations. The forced displaced people's questions and needs are transformed either to the police or military forces or to the humanitarian organizations settled in the area that they are accommodated in. For the Syrian refugees, they are governed by both the current military regime and the UNHCR-Egypt. According to the humanitarian law, refugees are used to be referred to as “protected people”. However, on-ground the law addresses them as “victims”. By classifying the Syrian refugees as victims, they have the “right” to be assisted with help. Nevertheless, the values of generosity and pragmatism of assistance are variable from urban refuge to another [17].

Based on a personal interview in Alexandria 2017 with Mostafa Abdullatif, a supervisor in CARE international organization, there are three foundations providing help to refugees in Alexandria. These are the

UNHCR, Caritas, and CARE. Thanks to their efforts, several programs are being run to empowering Syrians to supply them with accommodations, rental assistance, primary and vocational/technical education, sometimes employment and healthcare services. That is with the aim to modify the Syrian refugees' urban condition for an inclusive environment.

Caritas organization focuses on enabling education, finding jobs, facilitating psychological support, as well as providing primary and secondary healthcare services [33]. Yet, also according to the conversation with Abdullatif, CARE mainly works on the female refugees' empowerment. It gives them access to friendly and safe spaces, where they can socialize and attend awareness classes. Children care and grants for quick start businesses are also provided in order to encourage refugees' engagement, integration, and independence — in other words, they gave them the power for a bit transformation, from power “over” to power “to, with and within”.

Next, the UNHCR gives monthly cash assistance ranging between 400 and 1200 Egyptian pounds (20 to 60 Euros) to refugees in emergency, like in case of husband death, work inability, handicap or household loss. In addition, a monthly food voucher in the value of 400 EGP (20 Euro) is provided. However, these have to be spent in Fathala-Market branches, one of the famous hypermarkets in Egypt; according to personal interviews.

Moreover, the UNHCR is responsible for preparing all refugees' documents in Egypt. It also issues yellow and blue cards, which are recognized by the Egyptian authorities. The Yellow card is a temporary residence permit. It is subjected to renewal annually. Yet, the blue one indicates a “Refugee permanent residence's permit” [31]. This one is very rare to obtain. Indeed, during interviews, many Syrian refugees expressed their skepticism of obtaining the blue card. They believe the permanent residence permit might cause serious troubles once returning to Syria, such as being prisoned.

Due to the UNHCR effort and effect on the refugees, the institution in Egypt has gained the status of “sovereign” by many Syrians. This situation follows Micheal Foucault’s approach, that power does not stem from the exercise of sovereignty but rather the effects of power that a governmental technology generates [17]. Yet, the UNHCR, CARE, and Caritas organizations are increasing appointed member from the Syrian refugees to work at the foundation, mostly voluntary work or with nominal financial support — only to those who are well-educated (engineers, teachers, pharmacists, scientist), well-known for their socio-political activism and in good relation with different Syrian communities. Those people are referred to as directors, but in practice, they just facilitate access to UNHCR services; according to personal communication with Mariam Salem, social-supervisor at CARE international organization at Al-Nkhil Agamy district in Alexandria.

Despite the economic bottleneck that Egypt is stuck in, many Egyptians insist on supporting and welcoming the refugees, to “include” them. That is either via providing food, clothes, and furniture or even via assisting in paying rent, purchasing household equipment or establishing contacts to receive psychological treatment. These voluntarily assistances might proceed directly, or indirectly through churches, mosques, and local organizations. However, these individual endeavors are remarkably effective. They have motivated many refugees to further stay in Egypt. An obvious filling of “inclusiveness” has emerged, which has directly re-increased the Syrian refugees’ amount in Alexandria [31].

3.1.3 The Refugees Clustering in the City: Survive-“Mapping”

Since 2011, the Syrian refugees have been developing a clustering process, a “surviving” strategy. It is a collective manner for creating procedures “community-making” [16]. Alexandria accommodates a minimum of 23,386 registered refugees, in addition to the non-registered ones [15]. Alexandria attracts

refugees because of several reasons. First of all, it enjoys long Mediterranean joyful shores. It is a charming touristic city, multicultural and its weather is magnificent. That is in addition to being affordable and less expensive than Cairo [14].

Furthermore, by following chambers [1] perspective of power, “power with” and due to Alexandria’s reasonable seize, creating communication channels and social networks are easy to achieve. The Alexandrian urban refugees are spontaneously distributed all over the city. Some refugees choose to settle directly in the city center for the feeling of inclusion, while others cluster at the outskirts, far away from the city, where the feeling of exclusion [14].

3.2 *Urban Identity in Change: “No-Power” Expressions*

On one hand, yes, the Syrian refugees are receiving shelters and nutrition as above mentioned. But on the other, based on Foucault [34] approach, the “bio-power”, they are transformed into bodies’, “individuals” only to be fed, while totally ignoring their political presence. Consequently, their identity is reduced. Therefore, by re-considering the urban identity of refugees, it becomes clear that the refugees’ identity, as well as their political status, is directly related to the nature of urban refuge. The nature of the urban refuge varies if it is a distinct and enclosed space, or an open area within the urban fabric [17].

The above section (3.1), addressed the types of “Governance” and “Power”, which the Syrian refugees are enduring in Egypt. It underlines the refugees’ interaction not only with the Egyptian socio-political conditions but also with the assistance efforts which aim to re-increase the refugees’ right to the city, following an “empowerment” approach. In the end, the previous part emphasizes the refugees’ collective “self-clustering” mechanism. This part examines the impact of the abovementioned contests on the Alexandrian urban image. Do these challenges of “power” actions provoke modifications at the

“(im)material culture” level of the “urban refugees” in Alexandria? This section will also discover the influence of the changes occurring in the Egyptian-Syrian refugees’ relationship on the identity of the Alexandrian urban settings, the refugees “no-power” expressions. Since 2011 this bond has been going through various upward and downward phases, which used to switch between integration and isolation.

For this reason, the following Alexandrian three districts have been examined: “Al-Nkhel, El-Agamy”

gated community, “New Borg El-Arab” housing project and “El-Asafra, Sidi Becher” informal settlement. They have all dissimilar characters, in terms of location, society, and economy. Despite that, they have all existence material expressions created by the refugees. Examining them, in spite of their differences, allow generally analyzing the ongoing material culture and urban image alteration. (Fig. 1).

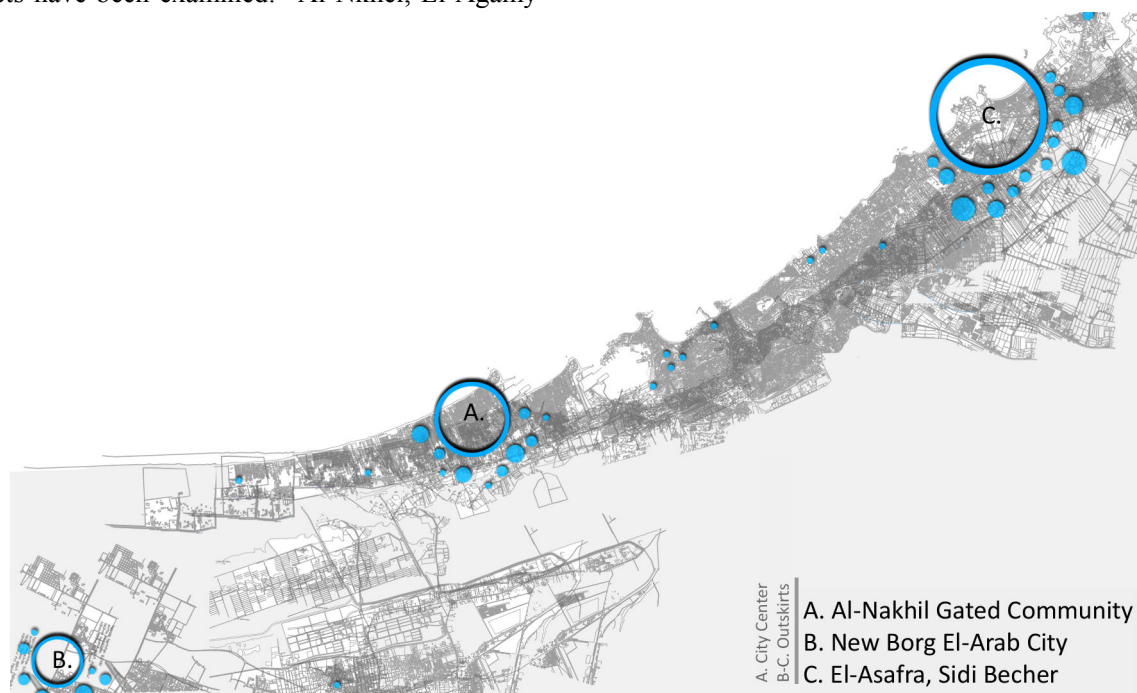


Fig. 1 Places of settlements of the Syrian refugees in Alexandria.

3.2.1 Al-Nkhil Agamy District: City within a City

Al-Nkhil community is a private middle-class gated community, located in El-Agamy district (a famous summery resort) at the far west of Alexandria. It is not a compound, as visitors and strangers have easy access to its premises. However, the gated community is detached from the rest of the El-Agamy vernacular area. It is surrounded by walls and has an impressive checkpoint at its single entrance. Based on personal communication with Mr. Abdullatif on 21 August 2017 and Mis Salem on 5 June 2017, only people sharing the same societal and financial "class" accommodate this gated space. Al-Nkhil gated community is a sign of an

emerging neo-liberal space in Alexandria. It is a closed space, extraterritorial, not truly belonging to El-Agamy district, subsisting “in” but not part “of” the city, a “city within a city” — a shift towards isolation and segregation due to “security and class discourses” [16, 17].

The key need for having a safe location has encouraged the Syrian refugees to settle at the Al-Nkhil district. Yes, the refugees are “isolated” from the Egyptian society outside the wall boundaries, but they feel safer. During a personal interview with El-Refaie, a Syrian woman refugee at Al-Nkhil, 05 June 2017, she confirms what Arous [16] suggests, that Syrian

refugees do not have any “integration” potentials, but they avoid all unwelcoming situations or comments. The external orientation towards society is secondary, as the internal dimension towards the community is the primary one. Alike did Walaa Badawy, a Syrian refugee volunteer and coworker at CARE international at Al-Nkhil, in a personal communication on 28 August 2017:

“The city quarter previously known as a summery resort has been transformed to be labeled as ‘little Damascus’” she said.

Accordingly, based on Foucault [35] approach, Al-Nkhil urban refuge has emerged as a “heterotopic place”. The area is economically connected but socially disconnected from the neighboring areas. Thus, the

area is not only characterized by being isolated from the surroundings but also having different spatial sets of urban rules (for instance, being out of the municipality urban regulation but regulated by informal negotiation between the neighbors) [35]. This was confirmed during a personal communication with Abdel-Megid on 03 April 2018, he explained that Al-Nkhil district has directly empowered the Syrians, especially on the market level. Now the gated community is overwhelmed with Syrian material culture signs: products, cultural products, and shops that donate their strong economical connections. However still on the social level, the closed area is almost totally disconnected from the Egyptian community, outside the wall (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Syrian market activities at Al-Nkhil gated community.

3.2.2 El-Asafra/Sidi Becher: Living in Shadow

According to the personal communication with Mr. Abdullatif on 21 August 2017, El-Asafra and Sidi Becher enjoy a central location in eastern Alexandria. Both are middle and low-class quarters, where several informal settlements are taking place. However, they are often described as “Shaabi” neighborhood — a negative attribute implying that the district is dangerous, dirty and traditional/ old-fashioned. They are places with high criminality rates and where drug dealers, as well as cartels, have a strong presence, the former and the latter are living in “Shadow”. However, the negative “Shaabi” reputation of El-Asafra and Sidi Becher districts imposes hard pressure on the Syrian refugees, especially females [16].

In the same personal interview with Abdullatif, he mentioned that the Syrian females imitate the dress codes of the Egyptians, in order to blend in society — that is to avoid sexual harassment, abuse, and direct physical violence. Male refugees, also, suffer from racial abuse, “racial discrimination” in public spaces. Exploitation by shop owners, or landlords, as well as humiliation by the employers, became normal everyday life experiences that they should endure [32]. The conditions are sometimes very critical that bloodstained street fights take place. A threatening breakdown in the relationships between the local citizens and refugees might be approaching [31].

El-Asafra and Sidi Becher’s urban refuge is well connected socially and economically to the

surrounding areas. However, the neighborhood's buildings are mostly informal. It is an unplanned urban with informal commercial centers and markets. Hence, this informality and lack of organization was accompanied by a state of legal disorder and law enforcement. That is because of "authority absence". El-Asafra and Sidi Becher spaces are mainly maintaining their social and political settings through the presence of the shadow authority [17].

Yet, now, thanks to this informality, the Syrian refugees have merged into the market, regardless of age and gender. Men, women, and kids work in

vending, delivery, construction, cleaning and housekeeping. Egyptians were competing to get Syrians employees, especially in the gastronomy sector, due to the latter good reputation, friendly attitude and low costs [16, 32]. This was also confirmed in a written communication on 24 May 2017 with Sally Sobhy, a Caritas worker in Alexandria. Some shops have replaced their Egyptian products, decorations, logos and titles with Syrian ones—a change that affects the city, especially regarding material culture and urban image. (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Syrian market activities at El-Asafra/Sidi Becher informal settlements.

3.2.3 New Borg El-Arab: New City

New Borg El-Arab is an industrial city at the very western edge of Alexandria. It has residential areas, but they used to be nearly empty — only some of those working in factories live there; according to the personal conversation with Abdullatif in Alexandria, on 21 August 2017. The urban was initially established as a human settlement "housing project". New Borg El-Arab city is not following the urban planning system of Alexandria, it is totally detached from Alexandria. Thus, the new city still misses services such as health, environment, education, aid, and food and nutrition centers. After the Syrian arrival, the area witnessed an upsurge of economic growth. According to the personal interview with Ibrahim, 28 April 2018, the

increase of income alleviated the living conditions of the refugees.

Zubiada Refei, a manager at Zehour El-Rahman kindergarten — the latter runs a partnership with CARE international organization at Borg El-Arab. She describes in personal communication, 02 June 2017, how she perceives the impressive development occurring at New Borg El-Arab City. The Syrian refugees have developed the quarter; that is her belief and her viewpoint. On the one hand, it is a positive standpoint emphasizing the integration, belonging and deep attachment to the neighborhood. However, on the other, it underlines an expected alteration in the material culture and urban image of the quarter. The modification is not only at the food, elevations and

clothes codes but also at the landmarks levels as material power expressions.

Despite the shortage in services, transportation, and urban facilities, New Borg El-Arab housing projects remain an attractive settlement for refugees. The main reason is its nearness to the industrial area where the refugees can work. Now the industrial area has not only Syrian workers but also entire Syrian factories based on the conversation with Abdullatif, 21 August 2017 [29].

In fact, New Borg El-Arab city has increased the awareness of its refugees, by breaking the barriers of fear with the authorities — an excluded city and far away from the political complications and conflicts. The success of this neighborhood community is attributed to the area; it has no-political natures — not a space for political representation. Instead, the area perform a social and service delivery function which aim to improve people's lives; to manage the Syrian refugees' daily lives conditions [17]. On the one hand, the city is fresh and well planned. But on the other, it is

far away, isolate and detached from the city center, therefore the Syrian are not exposed to any annoying discrimination acts. There are almost no tensions with the host community [16].

Next, in this community, the Syrians are using a customary law in case of crime or injury [36]. This law is based on El “Mokhtar”, a symbolic name used to refer to an authoritative figure that is familiar with the people and holds a predominantly bureaucratic role. Following Dean Approach the “Notions of morality and ethics generally rest on an idea of self-government. They presume some conception of an autonomous person capable of monitoring and regulating various aspects of their own conduct” [26]. Accordingly, El “Mokhtar” is considered as the “director” of a specific urban refuge. He occupies a ruling position, but without any local municipal power, just the citizens are empowering him for the position in a collective way. (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4 Syrian market activities at New Borg El-Arab city.

4. Conclusion

The socio-spatial relationship of Syrian refugees with power, sovereignty and governance are very complex in Egypt. Although they receive humanitarian financial assistance, they still struggle to establish social bonds in the host community. Furthermore, the Egyptian authorities allow the Syrian refugees neither

to practice nor to benefit from their rights of being residents in Egypt. They are considered a security threat, ‘something’ to be contained and subjected to strict control and surveillance. Therefore, the Syrian refugees in Egypt cannot overcome the self-perception of being “victims”.

They suffer from marginalization, as well as from the receiving hesitation which differs depending on the

various social factors at accommodation quarters. For instance, at El-Asafra/Sidi Becher urban refuge, they experience advanced geographical inclusion, but at the same time severe social exclusion. Unlike, at “Al-Nkhel, El-Agamy” gated community as well as at “New Borg El-Arab” city, the Syrian refugees are socially well integrated, although marginalized and segregated in terms of accommodation districts. This contradiction reveals the power-over-impact on the “space-refugee relationship”, especially in terms of the individual sovereignty feeling and the collective governance practice — an influence evolving, and maybe destroying, the metropolitan space use and the welcoming image of Alexandria.

Both, the material culture and urban image of Alexandria, are affected. The Syrian refugees emphasize their existence and skillfulness power via various material expressions. These are obvious in altering façade decorations, in offering different food cultures, and in establishing new business factories. Despite that, their decision to live in shadow indicates social cracks and coexistence tensions. For example, most female Syrian refugees follow an assimilation strategy for the sake of safety — not because they want to, but because they have to.

Moreover, considering the Syrian refugees as the driving factor, which has led to an increase in rental values, unemployment percentages, and criminality rates, raises doubts regarding racial discrimination. Yet, providing jobs, housings, and facilities just due to the one's gender or ethnicity means that segregation, inequality, and isolation are already taking place. These are not only “immaterial factors”, but also “powerlessness” expressions that directly damage the material culture of Alexandria.

Bourdieu [37] explains that the main role of the state is to create various forms of capital and to settle suitable “exchange rates” of conversion. Its goal is to structure the fields of social power, such as the political and juridical ones — that is with the aim of enabling the everyday urban transformation settings. Within the

research framework, this assumption underlines that if the government does not work on establishing a dialogue with the local community by adopting a bottom-up powerless-powerful perspective, the top-down powerful-powerless approach will dominate and the participation of refugees will remain in delay.

Therefore, the paper recommends further developing the Egyptian perspective of urban governance, sovereignty, and power, especially regarding the application of the power to empower strategy. The modifications should aim at empowering the Syrian refugees, and qualitatively hearing their voices. This is the way, through which the Syrian refugees can positively contribute to the further development of the Alexandrian space use and urban/refuge image. It is an attempt to create a “powerful city for all”.

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