State, Migration, and Borders' Fabric in the Middle East

Estado, migración y el tejido fronterizo en el Medio Oriente

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ABSTRACT

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Middle Eastern geography has been dramatically transformed with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of new states. In the Middle East, the definition of territories remains problematic as shown by the permanence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and national affiliations remain sometimes problematic, the Kurdish example being the most symptomatic. The analysis of migration and state building in the region contributes to give a non-static reading of boundaries and helps to understand the multiple meanings of the term (state borders, communitarian borders, categorizations processes, local variations of borders in places of settlement).

Keywords: 1. Middle East, 2. migration, 3. refugees, 4. conflict, 5. diaspora.

RESUMEN

Desde principios del siglo XX, la geografía del Medio Oriente se ha transformado dramáticamente con la caída del Imperio Otomano y la creación de nuevos estados. En el Medio Oriente, la definición de los territorios sigue siendo problemática, como se muestra por la permanencia del conflicto palestino-israelí, y a veces las afiliaciones nacionales siguen siendo problemáticas, el ejemplo kurdo es el más sintomático. El análisis de la migración y la construcción del Estado en la región contribuye a dar una lectura no estática de los límites y ayuda a comprender los múltiples significados del término (las fronteras estatales, las fronteras comunitarias, los procesos de categorizaciones, las variaciones locales de las fronteras en los lugares de asentamiento).

Palabras clave: 1. Medio Oriente, 2. migración, 3. refugiados, 4. conflicto, 5. diáspora.

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> Our reality is transported. It was never fixed in one place. The reality of Palestinians is carried on the shoulders, in the language, perception or consciousness. We all live simultaneously in the centre of the scene and outside of it.[1]
>
> *La Palestine comme métaPphore*
> Mahmoud Darwish (1997)

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Middle Eastern geography has been dramatically transformed with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of new states. As mentioned by Postel-Vinay (2013), "[i]f globalization [...] of the European international system during the late 19th century was [in the Middle East] a great conceptual and political challenge, the acceptance of the Westphalian principle of sovereignty and its territorial expression—the boundaries between nations—was nevertheless terribly complex". Nation building is still problematic in the Middle East. If states have acquired legitimacy, national constructions are still challenged and divisions are exacerbated during conflicts (e.g. current Syrian crisis) or political instability (e.g. Iraq since 2003). In the Middle East, the definition of territories remains problematic as shown by the permanence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and national affiliations remain sometimes problematic, the Kurdish example being the most symptomatic. How can we think boundary construction in the Middle East outside of these normative frameworks?

Despite the multiplicity of territorial conflicts in the region, few studies have been published on border issues in the Middle East (Migdal, 2004; Meier, 2013). Historical and political contexts in which boundaries are constructed were profoundly transformed throughout the twentieth century, as Migdal wrote in the introduction of a collective work on border issues. He notes that "borders are impermanent features of social life, dependent on particular circumstances rather than being permanent fixtures of human society. The status of borders have been contingent on varying historical circumstances, rather than being immutably rock-like" (Migdal, 2004:5). State borders were drawn by colonial divisions. They have acquired legitimacy over time as a marker of state construction. However, they do not overlap the construction of imagined communities, as defined by Benedict Anderson, which are part of larger spaces and refer to ethnic and/or religious affiliations that cross state boundaries. Contemporary Middle East witnesses

[1]All the translations have been done by the author.

a paradoxical phenomenon. On one hand, the often disputed borders are spaces of assertion of the sovereignty of the State, on the other, they are crossed by a considerable number of migrants, forced or not. The settlements of these migrants lead to deep changes in host societies in terms of demographic balance as well as identity construction at the local level.

As Fredrik Barth (2000:17) raises, the concept of boundary "embraces three levels of abstraction": *1)* "it divides territories on the ground", *2)* it "sets limits that mark social groups off from each other", and *3)* "it provides a template for that which separates distinct categories of the mind". The analysis of migration and state building in the region contributes to give a non-static reading of boundaries and helps to understand the multiple meanings of the term (state borders, communitarian borders, categorizations processes, local variations of borders in places of settlement). Current migration disrupts borders and the capacity of states to control them.

Whatever is the degree of legitimacy of the border constructions, and ethno-religious categorizations, in the Middle East, they have performative effects. They are places of privileged observations of social interactions and reading of political processes as well as actions of the State in the exercise of its sovereignty. The analysis of these processes, through migration and migrant settlement in the cities, allows to understand the latter not as limits, but dynamic spaces. Daniel Meier notes that "borders (understood as physical delimitations) and boundaries (seen as symbolic systems of categorization) are arbitrary constructions which nevertheless generate practices and become embodied. This idea has the merit of emphasizing that the relation between space and identity constitutes one of the fundamental frames of social life" (Meier, 2013:353). In this article I will focus on the different actors involved in the fabric of borders in the Middle East at different scales. When it comes to state borders, the process is highly political and rooted in historical heritages, while social boundaries result from more complex processes at the local level.

With more than 20 million migrant workers—a quarter of the total migrants in developing countries—the Middle East is one of the main regions of emigration and immigration in the world. Known as emigration countries, Syria, Lebanon or Jordan, are now becoming also reception and transit spaces for economic and forced migrants (De Bel-Air, 2006). The Middle East remains also a region with important emigration flows, with an estimated population of more than 12 million emigrants currently residing abroad. These emigration movements represent

partly a continuation of long-established diasporas that attract newcomers, as it is the case for the Lebanese diaspora. Emigration movements are also linked to the permanence of conflicts and the persistence of important economic inequalities. Migrations obey to regional and state constraints as well as dynamics generated by refugees themselves and lie upon migratory networks set up on local and familial bases. Contemporary migrations and refugee movements can only be understood in the context of high mobility, both at the regional level with the importance of cross-border migration, and global level with the existence of transnational networks and highly structured protracted diasporas.

State borders are often perceived as limits that cannot be easily crossed and which block human circulation. State sovereignty materializes itself by different means of regulations which produce different categories of migrants, such as legal/illegal, accepted/rejected, integrated/excluded, etcetera. By the networks they create and their know-how (savoir faire), migrants manage to circumvent these boundaries. Therefore, new categories of migrants emerge between refugees, migrant workers and illegal migrants at the border. If the state border is the first boundary to be crossed by international migrants, it is declined thereafter—in the places of settlement and/or transit—on various scales and in several spheres: community, cultural and legal.

Mainly based on fieldwork research conducted in the Middle East since 1997 on Palestinian and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, I will explore the polysemy of the concept of border in the region through the notions of state, conflict and migration.

This article is structured as follows. I will first analyse the role of state building and the definition of borders on the development of contemporary migration movements in the Middle East. I will then investigate the role of diasporas in the cross-border migration development and the forms of categorization associated to mobility. In the last part of this article I will analyse the way the settlement of refugee communities blurs the boundaries between refugees, migrants and citizens in urban areas.

STATE BUILDING, MIGRATION AND THE FABRICS OF BORDERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The delineation of borders in the Middle East is a complex process that is relatively new and the result of colonial divisions and national claims. Some of which have

not led to the creation of a state, as it is the case for the Palestinians or the Kurds. In each conflict today, as in Iraq or Syria, the debate about the viability of states in their current territories and the fear of new divisions appears. If some people are divided by state boundaries, other groups, like the Bedouins, rarely taken into account when states were created in the mid-twentieth century, found themselves hampered in their ancestral practices by new state borders. Their grazing areas do not overlap the new boundaries of the states (Chatty, Mansour and Yassin, 2013).

From the Ottoman Empire to state building

Since more than fifty years the successive conflicts in the Middle East confirm the continued tensions in the region. The emergence of these conflicts cannot be reduced to communitarian and/or religious antagonisms. This over-simplistic view contributes to hide geopolitical issues underlying these protracted crises. For example, Arab-Israeli conflict is symptomatic of deep cleavages within the region. State building as well as intervention of foreign powers, are sources of tension. Middle Eastern political organization has dramatically changed throughout the twentieth century after the fall of the Ottoman Empire that ruled for more than four centuries the region. By the joint action of the French and British colonial powers and the nationalist movements that emerged at the turn of the last century, this area administered by Istanbul without state border has been divided into a series of states that have deeply reshaped the regional geography. These boundaries have generated tensions and opened the door to conflicts in the region during the twentieth century. The East-West rivalry during the Cold War (e.g. Syria was backed by the Soviet Union while Jordan by the USA) as well as the desire to control oil resources are additional factors that contribute to enhance the disputes between Middle Eastern states.

Parallel to this State-building process, this region is characterized by a strong and ancient human mobility as a result of regional economic disparities and actions of political powers that have succeeded. Migration appears as a key element in understanding the changes in the organization of this space (Bourgey, 1985; Bocco 1994; Shami, 1994; Simon 1995). In the first half of the nineteenth century, for example, Caucasian and North African populations came to settle in this part of the Ottoman Empire. Then, after 1850 intra-regional movements appear. The movement of people is then facilitated by the absence of state borders.

Following the First World War, Middle Eastern geography was completely reshaped by the French and British colonial powers and the subsequent inde-

pendences that divide the region into distinct entities separated by state borders. Migration continued and developed in this new regional context. For example, the state of Israel has built itself on Jewish immigration. Jewish identity is one of the main sources of legitimacy of the state as opposed to Arab (Palestinian) identity (Bazin, 1995). On a different perspective, oil revenue turned the Gulf monarchies into major employment centres in the early 1970s, to which many Arab migrants and other migrants from Asia headed.

It is in this context that the first Palestinian migration began, before 1948, at a time when state borders did not already exist. Since the late nineteenth century, networks existed, connecting the various Palestinian communities scattered in the Arab cities of the Ottoman Empire. These cities concentrated flows of migrants inside and outside the Middle East. At that time, as Elias Sanbar (1984) shows, many Palestinian merchant families settled in Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, and Haifa. A class of Palestinian entrepreneurs developed and family, commercial, matrimonial and political ties developed between these Arab cities. Parallel to intra-regional movements, in the early twentieth century, tens of thousands of Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese crossed the Atlantic ocean to settle in Latin America.

Parallel to commercial and economic based migrations flows, conflicts have also generated refugee flows. One can mention the Armenian genocide of the early twentieth century, the Palestinian refugees following the different Arab-Israeli conflicts, Lebanese escaping civil war, Iraqis and Iranians leaving their country during the Iran—Iraq war and more recently conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Gildas Simon (1995: 361) notes in this regard that the Palestinian exodus "illustrates almost symbolic human traumas that have continued to affect the region for forty years". Forced migrations are the product of deep changes in the geographical organization of the Middle East throughout the twentieth century.

Borders, identity and statelessness

The borders of the British Mandate in Palestine—which began after the First World War—were not drawn arbitrarily but correspond to a slow evolution of the perception of this space by its inhabitants, the Ottoman central government or the European powers. A Palestinian geographical unit gradually emerged from the second half of the nineteenth century drawing borders that form the Palestinian/Israeli territory that we know today. Various attempts to unify this space emerged in the late nineteenth century, around the idea of the Holy Land, developed by

Europeans and Eastern Christians. Several religious descriptions have contributed to build a Palestinian space that extends between Dan (north of Palestine) to Beersheva (south of Palestine).

Since 1947, the Arab-Israeli conflict can be read at two different scales. The dispute between Israel and the Arab states is mostly territorial. It is the issues of borders, legitimacy, security of states and the sharing of water resources that divide the protagonists. Between Israel and the Palestinians, territorial and demographic differences are completely intertwined. Every Israeli expansion contributes to deconstruct the Palestinian socio-spatial organization and generate new refugee flows. Throughout this period the state of Israel has consolidated its borders and witnessed the arrival of new Jewish immigrants. Consistency between the territory of the state and the Israeli settlement increased. At the same time, the Palestinians gradually lost their territory, which has been emptied of a large part of its Arab inhabitants. Palestine, as a political and geographical entity disappeared from the Middle Eastern political map, while more than half of the Palestinian population experienced exile.

A parallel can thus be drawn between the delimitation of state border and demarcation of ethnic, religious and/or national groups. The border of the state overlaps then the border of identity, which aims to define an "Other one" excluded from any form of participation in the identity of the new state. As noted by Hannah Arendt (1991), "[i]t is not in terms of military casualties, economic loss, or destruction caused by military victories that can be estimated in the most realistic way what was the price to pay by the peoples of the Middle East to the events of last year [1948], but in terms of political change, the most striking was the creation of a new category of stateless persons, the Arab refugees". Palestinian emigration can be considered as a byproduct of the creation of the state of Israel and the absence of a Palestinian state. Palestinian identity, like the Kurdish one, is not reprensented in the region by a territorially based state, delimited by international borders. Exile, statelessness and refugeeness are then some of the results of state building in the region.

MIGRATIONS AND DIASPORAS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THE EMERGENCE OF CROSS-BORDER CIRCULATION.

If migration is in part the result of conflicts and delimitation of state borders in the Middle East, they are also the result of earlier practices rooted in patterns of

circulation at the regional level. This partly explains why today, despite the existence of state borders often difficult to cross because of the many conflicts, we are witnessing the development of a major cross-border migration. This is based on the existence of ancient diasporas in the region as well as other forms of mobility, such as commercial traffic or pilgrimages.

The role of pre-State diasporas in shaping contemporary emigration movements

Contemporary migrations, such as refugee movements, due to their strong symbolic signification such as in the Armenian, Palestinian or Lebanese cases, tend to minimize former diasporic construction. Nonetheless, these former emigration movements have contributed to shape contemporary migration movements. The geography of most of Middle Eastern populations extends well beyond the borders of their respective states. For example the Lebanese diaspora has developed through emigration for over 150 years toward Southern and Northern America and West Africa. There is probably between 3 and 4 million Lebanese abroad, although much higher estimates are sometimes mentioned. Only a part of them emigrated as refugees.

One can identify several waves of emigration from the Middle East beginning in the first half of the nineteenth century, some of them continuing until today. The causes of these emigration trends are plural, combining economic crisis, conflicts and political instability, or seeking for job opportunity abroad. For example, Lebanese emigration resumed with the outbreak of civil war in 1975, which ended in 1989 with the signing of the Taif Agreement. The estimates indicate the departure of more than 900 000 Lebanese during this period, towards American and African continents, Australia, Canada and Western Europe. Departures were mainly the result of insecurity linked to the various conflicts that occurred as well as the deep economic crisis in the country in the 1980s. Pre-existing diasporic networks have played a central role to facilitate the settlement of Lebanese in their host countries.

As mentioned earlier, the Palestinian diaspora has also pre-existed to the *Nakba* (Arabic for catastrophe) of 1948. Many Palestinians left at the end of the Ottoman period and during the British mandate to the American continent. Others settled close to Palestine borders and in other parts of the Middle East such as Jordan. The networks created during this period of time will be mobilized following the creation of the State of Israel and will facilitate the future settlement of refugees in their host countries such as Jordan, Lebanon or Syria

Mobility, circulation and cross-border migration

In the Middle East, perhaps more than elsewhere, the plurality of forms of migration and mobility that coexist or succeed one another in time, make the distinction between forced and voluntary migration not relevant. The Middle East has always been crossed by trade routes that have shaped this region in a vast area of cross-border migratory circulation. Without going back to ancient times, Aleppo and Damascus formed for Iraqi traders cities of reference reinforced in 2003 by the conflict in Iraq. A number of traders or small Iraqi entrepreneurs residing in Damascus between 2006 and 2010 had already commercial relations before their exile with Syria. Most of them lived there for short periods before settling in Damascus or Aleppo because of the insecurity and the economic crisis that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. They have also transferred some of their activities to other countries while maintaining their existing supply networks. This pre-existing trade links may partly explain the strong entrepreneurial development of Iraqis in Syria between 2006 and 2011 (Doraï, 2009a).

Pilgrimages are another form of mobility in the region. The pilgrimage routes to Mecca in Saudi Arabia cross the region, particularly Syria and Jordan. They are used by many Arab Muslim pilgrims but also by a growing number of Muslim pilgrims from the former Soviet republics. Merchant places, such as the *souq* in Damascus called Souq Al-Daghestani, are linked to large areas of transnational circulation and contribute to redraw routes developed during the Ottoman era by reviving the old broken networks during the Cold War (Balci, 2003). Beyond these pilgrimage routes—concerning mainly Sunni Muslims—Shia Muslims have developed in Syria numerous mausoleums that became very popular with Shia pilgrims from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. The Sayda Zaynab mosque in the southern suburb of Damascus witnessed a very important development. The mausoleum of the saint was restored with Iranian funds. Hotels and commercial infrastructures developed there. This area has also hosted Iraqis—mainly Shia political opposition in the years 1980 and 1990—after 2003 to become one of the symbols of the Iraqi presence in Syria. The bus station, as well as residential areas and near the highway leading to the international airport were equally used until 2011 by pilgrims, merchants, and Iraqi refugees. Some of them belong simultaneously to the three categories.

Migration, conflicts and diasporas

Refugee movements, and the way receiving countries treat them are, often linked to geopolitical tensions in the region, the selective opening or closing of national borders, reflecting mostly the evolution of relations between state actors. Compliance with international asylum standards is often secondary. In the Middle East, particularly affected by conflicts and political tension, the movement of people is a major geopolitical indicator, each crisis leading to temporary or long term relocation of tens of thousands of refugees. The notion of asylum is questioned, while the legal status of refugee—except in the case of Palestinians—, is not recognized by any of the states in the region (Zaiotti, 2006).

The temporalities in which these migrations occur are very diverse. In the Palestinian case, refugee camps were created following 1948 and 1967 wars. They still exist and they became the symbol of the non-resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflicts. Refugee camps are today urbanized, but their status is precarious and subject to a strong stigma in their respective host countries, or even destruction such as in Jordan during Black September (1970) and more recently in Northern Lebanon with Nahr al-Bared refugee camp (2007).

More recently, the opening of the Syrian borders gave to the Iraqis a form of territorial sanctuary where they could find safety and attempt to return to a normal life free of violence and daily threats. It also helped, as far as possible, many families to reunite and develop transnational solidarity while adapting to the radical changes they experienced. But none of them had access to a recognized refugee status. They were considered by Syrian authorities as "temporary guests" (Chatelard and Doraï, 2009).

The emigration of Iraqis after the war of 2003 by a coalition of states led by the United States of America must be included in its regional context and is part of a longer time frame, reactivating family networks broken by forced exile. Many Iraqis left during the reign of Saddam Hussein. Iraq has indeed witnessed since the early 1980s several major conflicts that have led to the departure of hundreds of thousands of refugees. In 2003, on the eve of the fall of Saddam Hussein, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) counted 400 000 Iraqi refugees in over 90 countries. More than half of them settled in Iran, the others left primarily to Europe (Germany, Netherlands and Sweden), and then to the United States and Australia. It is assumed that 1.5 million Iraqis have left their country between 1990 and 2002. Some of them have obtained refugee status, but

a large proportion are illegal migrants in their host or transit country. Countries like Jordan and Turkey have played a central role in the reception and transit of Iraqis (Al-Ali, 2007; Chatelard, 2005). Syria supported the American-led coalition in 1990, and the border was officially closed between the two countries until 1997. The number of Iraqis seeking refuge in Syria was then lower than in Jordan or Iran, and concerned mainly political opponents to the Saddam Hussein's regime (Sassoon, 2009).

Ten years after the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, returns of Iraqis remain low, even if they are difficult to quantify. Re-emigration towards non Middle Eastern countries occurs gradually, in part via resettlement schemes implemented by the UNHCR, but most often spontaneously in connection with the Iraqi diaspora living in Europe, North America and Australia since the 1970s. Other, often more skilled, continue to migrate to the Gulf countries where they can find employment. diasporas that have developed since the second half of the nineteenth century, or more recently, are often mobilized by more recent migrant groups as support and mobility support in highly constraint situations.

From settled refugees to stateless migrants

There is no direct link between precarious settlement and precarious legal status in the host countries for forced migrants. Refugees with only temporary status can be settled on the long-term in their host states, as is the case for Iraqis in Jordan or Sudanese in Lebanon. Instead, groups of well-established refugees may be expelled en masse, as it has been the case of Palestinians in Kuwait in 1990-1991, in Libya in 1995, when major geopolitical crises occured in the region. Other groups are caught up in a conflict that happens in their host countries. This was the case of the Palestinian refugees from Iraq who arrived after the creation of Israel in 1948. They were well integrated in their host country. Following the fall of the Baathist regime, they lost any form of protection from the Iraqi state. As stateless refugees they were forced to leave their host country (which was for the majority their country of birth). As Palestinians without status they were stuck in temporary camps in no-man's land on the border between Syria and Iraq pending resettlement in a third country that would accept them. Some countries hosting an old Palestinian diaspora such as Chile have accepted the resettlement of hundreds of Palestinian refugees from Iraq. Palestinian refugees from Syria are facing the same situation since the beginning of the crisis, searching asylum in Lebanon and Jordan where they are vulnerable.

In general, migrants in the Middle East are still kept in somewhat precarious statuses. Even when local integration seems developed, this does not always guarantee integration on the long term. In fact, forms of local integration are most often articulated with transnational connections, and therefore represent a step in the migration route to third countries or to secure and prepare for a possible return.

ASYLUM AND MOBILITY: BLURRING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN CAMPS AND CITIES

In the Middle East, where today several million of refugees and displaced peoples concentrate (mainly Palestinians, Syrians, Sudanese and Iraqis), the refugee population is predominantly urban whether in Cairo, Amman, Beirut and Damascus. At the same time, the entire region is experiencing rapid urban development. Migrants—domestic and international, forced or not—are one of the main driving force of this development. The existence of old urbanized Palestinian or Armenian refugee camps redefines the boundaries between categories classically used such as camp and city or refugee and citizen. As noted by Joel S. Migdal "[p]eople draw their mental maps by configuring the world as familiar and unfamiliar spaces. They are thus constantly navigating, searching for those 'manners of acting' that can delineate configurations of spaces where they feel that they are, or should be, relatively safe, places that somehow feel familiar and different from chaotic sense of the totally unfamiliar" (Migdal, 2004:10). New spaces emerge in the urban landscape, and the migrants contribute to draw new boundaries in the city.

Neighborhoods where pilgrims, refugees and migrant workers mix develop and inscribe parts of the cities in transnational circulation. Populations increasingly diverse mix together, attend, coexist and give rise to new urban identities marked by a cosmopolitanism "from below". The very identity of some neighborhoods has been sharply transformed by the arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees. These transformations do not occur without tensions, and the legitimacy of the presence of foreign newcomers is seen by some as an intrusion into an area historically marked by a particular group. However, at the micro-local level, new forms of interaction and solidarity have emerged, based on neighborhoods relations belonging to a common ethnic or religious group or economic complementarity. These interactions contribute to redefine the boundaries of groups, as Fredrik Barth (1969) defines it, such as citizens, foreigners, migrants and refugees in these new contexts of cohabitation.

Refugees in camp vs. urban refugees?

The UNHCR makes a distinction between *refugees in camps,* and *refugees outside camps,* whether in urban areas or rural settlements. This categorization is linked to the implementation of their policies of assistance and eventual protection. The rapid development of refugee movements in the Middle East since the 1990s, such as Sudanese in Cairo, Iraqis in Damascus and Amman or Syrians in neighbouring countries, and the permanence of the Palestinian question, invites us to reconsider the modes of settlement of refugee groups.

Refugee studies have produced since the 1970s a wide range of categories to describe refugee movement or settlement such as *urban refugees, camp dwellers, self settled refugees,* etcetera (Black, 1991; Zetter, 2007). The classical distinction operated between refugee camps dwellers and urban refugees is mainly an operational one produced by international organisation. This categorization has to be differentiated from the evolution of refugee camps and from the practices developed by the refugees themselves. Refugee camps are not closed areas even when they are geographically isolated, they can be connected to a wider environment through mobility or transnational connections such as remittances (Doraï, 2003; Fresia, 2006; Horst, 2002).

The categories of *urban refugee* and *camp dweller* are often considered through their residency place and not according to their short and/or long term spatial practices. Mobility is a key practice to take into consideration because it reveals the complementarities of different urban spaces, and the different kinds of relations they have. Refugees living in camps experience different scales of mobility (daily movements, temporary and long term emigration, forced displacement, etcetera) and develop a wide range of practices (economic, political, cultural and/or social activities) that cross the camp's boundaries. Mobility and migrations have to be understood in their different temporalities. On the long term, refugee camp population changes, some refugees leaving the camp to settle elsewhere, newcomers come to settle in the camp for a variety of reasons that will be developed. Different generations of refugees have experienced life in exile, each of them having a specific relation to the camp, due to specific socio-historical context. Individual trajectories also contribute to blur the distinction between urban refugees and camp dwellers. Many refugees reside successively inside and outside camps during their life to access different kind of resources (Hyndman, 2000:158-162; Fresia, 2006).

Refugee camps themselves host temporarily or more permanently different waves and groups of refugees. New immigrant communities also settle in the camps and/or around the camps. In Damascus for example, Iraqis refugees settle

in neighbourhoods composed of Palestinian refugees, internally displaced Syrians from the Golan and internal migrants coming from the countryside. The same pattern can be found in most of the Middle Eastern cities such as Beirut, Amman or Cairo (Al-Ali, 2004:9-12). Urban margins, where refugees and migrants settle, are not disconnected from the urban dynamics of the surrounding cities.

Despite the diversity of existing situations, refugee movements are generally long lasting and the end of conflicts does not always mean return for the entire refugee population. The settlement of these populations generates deep changes of entire neighbourhoods. Thus, refugees should not be considered only as recipients of humanitarian assistance, waiting for an eventual return or resettlement in a third country, but also as actors who contribute, through their initiatives and coping strategies, to the development of the cities that host them. An important part of the southern suburbs of Beirut was constituted by Palestinian refugees following 1948 and later internally displaced Lebanese originating from south Lebanon, along with other migrants such as Syrians (Clerc, 2006). Cities like Amman have experienced deep urban changes with the arrival of 300 000 Palestinians expelled from Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion in 1990 (Van Hear, 2005). More recently, some neighbourhoods in Damascus have been profoundly transformed by the settlement of thousands of Iraqis escaping war, violence and economic difficulties since the 1990s and on a larger scale since 2003 (Doraï, 2009b).

Iraqi refugees and the urbanisation process in Damascus[2]

Urban development in Damascus depends largely on the arrival of new migrant population both Syrian and from abroad, who settle in the suburbs of the city. Since 1948—not to go back to previous waves prior to the country's independence—Damascus is a place of settlement for different groups of refugees, mainly from the Arab world. The proportion of refugees and displaced people compared to the total population of the Syrian capital is very high. Mainly composed by Palestinians (more than 350 000 individuals in Damascus area), the refugee group is also composed by several hundred Somalis, Afghans, Sudanese and Yemenis and the large displaced population from the occupied Syrian Golan estimated to 300 000 individuals. Since 2003, thousands of Iraqi refugees have settled.[3]

[2]A previous version of the two following sections were published in 2010 in the Middle East Institute *Viewpoints, Special Edition, Migration and the Mashreq*.

[3]In absence of census, there is a debate on the actual number of Iraqis in Syria; Syrian authorities claiming that around 1.2 to 1.5 million Iraqis are in Syria, whereas the UNHCR registered around

In absence of refugee camps to accommodate them, more than two thirds of the Iraqis registered at the UNHCR live in Damascus. The proportion of total refugee and displaced population is very high for a city of just over 4 million inhabitants.

Since the 1970s Syria hosts opponents of the previous Iraqi regime. In 1992, after the war, the situation changed and the major part of the Iraqis who arrived in Syria left Iraq because of the political context and economic difficulties. Most of the Iraqis were young men who settled down in large number in Sayda Zaynab, a southern suburb of Damascus. Most of them worked as daily workers or street sellers, but some of them developed small Iraqi businesses. The poorest stayed in Syria until 2003, the richest or those who have structured migratory networks managed to emigrate to Europe, North America or Australia.

The vast majority of Iraqis in Syria are of urban origin, Baghdad being the main city concerned by the current exodus. The Iraqis settle in Damascus where the previous migratory waves had settled down, but also because it is easier to find employment and also because of the proximity of international agencies and NGOs. The Iraqi presence in Damascus concentrates in some of the neighbourhoods of the suburb of Damascus as Sayda Zaynab, Jaramana, Massaken Barzeh, Yarmouk or Qodsiyyeh, and in more remote localities where the renting price is lower such as in Sednaya or Tell, and in a lesser extent in other cities such as Aleppo, Lattaquieh or Deir el Zor.

The urban landscape is deeply changing since the arrival of Iraqis. Iraqi businesses and restaurants as well as travel agencies specialised on Iraq develop rapidly and modify locally the townscape. The Iraqis have developed their own activities in the different suburbs of Damascus, ranging from street sellers, to small clothing manufactures or small grocery shops. These economic activities are both connected to personal itineraries of the entrepreneurs and workers and the rather flexible urban context in which they are situated which has facilitated the adaptation of the newcomers.

The urbanization process of Palestinian refugee camps

In the Palestinian case, due to the rapid urbanization of the Middle Eastern countries, most of the refugee camps are part of the capitals and main cities in their respective countries or host regions. Sixty years of exile have generated new forms

200 000 since 2003. According to many observers the actual number should be close to those registered with the UNHCR.

of local integration, especially in urban areas where refugee camps are now part of the cities that surround them. Since late 1940s, refugee camps transformed deeply from tents to highly dense built up areas. Since the 1950s the places where Palestinians settled in the suburbs of Beirut where not only Palestinians areas, but poor and segregated neighbourhoods where marginalised migrants, such as Syrians, Kurds or Armenians also settle (Sfeir, 2008). Parallel to the urbanisation process, refugee camp population has profoundly changed due to emigration, internal displacement and social mobility.

Refugee camps can become parts of urban areas or may become themselves urban centres due to their demographic weight and the variety of activities developed, such as socio-economic activities, political centres of decision, and the central role they play in the Palestinian society in exile. In some specific cases, the categorisation depends upon the institution in charge of the refugees. For example in Damascus, Yarmouk is considered a refugee camp by the Syrian authorities whereas the UNRWA[4] does not recognise it as such. At an operational level (international responsibility, access to services, legal context, etcetera) a clear distinction exists between camp dwellers and urban refugees. But the analysis of the geographical development of refugee camps in their local context leads us to consider the refugee camps as urban areas. Camps tend to look increasingly like that of the poorer informal urban areas nearby. The temporal dimension of the Palestinian exile is also a key element to take into consideration. Sixty years of exile have led to a specific relation with their host societies, with a strong local integration linked to a rapid urbanisation of the different host countries, parallel to a strong segregation due to the socio-political and legal context.

Refugee camps themselves host temporarily or more permanently different waves and groups of refugees. New immigrant communities also settle in the camps and/or around the camps. In Damascus for example, Iraqis refugees settle in neighbourhoods composed of Palestinian refugees, internally displaced Syrians from the Golan and internal migrants coming from the countryside. The same pattern can be found in most of the Middle Eastern cities such as Beirut, Amman or Cairo. Urban margins, where refugees and migrants settle, are not disconnected from the urban dynamics of the surrounding cities. Refugee camps develop ties with their urban environment that cross the boundaries between the camp—as a delimited administrative entity—and the city. Even if they are segregated and marginalised, they are part of the urban settings that host them.

[4]United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

CONCLUSION

As Béatrice Hibou states, "Recent scholarship on borders is a manifestation of the recognition that boundaries are central sites, or privileged spaces of observation of fluid and moving forms and of the continuous formation of social and political practices as well as state practices" (Hibou, 2004:353). The process of building state borders in the Middle East is rather recent, although the current state boundaries partially overlap with the regions that have existed during the Ottoman period. These state borders only partially match other boundaries, such as those of ethnic and religious groups. They are also crossed by a diversity of population movements, being part of ancient diasporic or commercial circulation or more recent refugee movements. Since the creation of states in the Middle East in the mid-twentieth century migration, migratory circulation have consistently circumvent these limits and have inscribed the presence of the other in the heart of their respective host societies, as it is the case for the Palestinian refugees in Arab countries since 1948. We are witnessing a constant reorganization of Middle Eastern societies by migration, contributing to redraw the contours of the suburbs of major cities in the region.

As shown by Fredrik Barth (1969), it is in the interactions between these groups that draw boundaries and make them evolve. Solidarities or new antagonisms form according to the new cohabitations that develop, some long-lasting other ephemeral. At a local scale, the limits of Palestinian refugee camps disappear; new forms of urbanity arise in the interaction between refugees and migrants from increasingly diverse origins. Community boundaries decline at certain times to give rise to class solidarities. They can also strengthen other times in case of conflict or tension.

In an unstable Middle Eastern political context, Iraqi and Palestinian cases demonstrate the importance of forced migration in urban development and their articulation with other forms of migration such as internal migration and international labour migration. Most of the current refugee populations settle in urban areas to access resources and develop in certain localities their own social and economic activities contributing to the urban change. In the specific Palestinian case, a diachronic analysis of the different camps evolution enables to retrace their specific history and the different ties with their local urban environment. On the one hand, camps appear to be marginalised and segregated areas due to the special—and often changing—regulation and mode of controls as well as the legal status of their Palestinian residents. On the other hand, refugee camps are strongly

connected to their urban environment through the daily mobility of Palestinian refugees, the growing presence of other groups of refugees and migrants (such as foreign workers, asylum seekers and refugees), and the development of commercial activities that blur the boundaries of the refugee camps, making it a part of the city.

The current Syrian crisis led to one of the most important refugee movements in the region since 1948. The communitarian component of the conflict threatens territorial unity of the state. The country is *de facto* divided, and the massive refugee movement, mainly Sunni Muslims, is changing the demographic composition of Syrian society while exacerbating sectarian divisions. Their settlement in neighbouring countries is having also a very deep impact on host societies leading to deep urban change in Amman or Beirut.

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