

REFUGEE WATCH

A South Asian Journal on Forced Migration

45

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Introduction

By

Anita Sengupta *

The image of a dark haired toddler wearing a bright red T shirt and shorts washed up on a beach and lying face down in the surf, not far from the town of Bodrum in Turkey, went viral and brought to the forefront the unfolding human tragedy resulting from conflicts in large parts of West Asia. The Turkish media identified the boy as three year old Aylan Kurdi whose five year old brother had met with a similar fate as their family drowned attempting to reach the Greek island of Kos from the conflict ridden Syrian town of Kobani. The image created outrage and demands for the EU to put together a plan to deal with the crisis as unprecedented numbers of people migrate to escape the violence unleashed by the Islamic State. And this is not an isolated incident. On the same day, in end of August this year, twin migrant tragedies were reported-- one where 71 refugees including a baby girl were found dead in an abandoned freezer truck in Austria and another where Libya recovered the bodies of 82 migrants who had been washed ashore after their over-crowded boat had sunk on its way to Europe. Migrant tragedies while crossing the Mediterranean has been increasingly in the news and like the victims of the freezer truck tragedy in Austria those washed ashore were also probably from Syria and Iraq. As large parts of what is defined as the greater Middle East gets embroiled in conflicts (resulting in human tragedies and movements across borders) and European states like Hungary respond with measures to confront what it terms threats to European 'security, prosperity and identity' and refuse the right to both resettlement and movement, the academic need to reengage with the issue of forced migration in terms of emerging scenarios assumes increasing significance.

The Introduction to the *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* begins with the argument that there is little consensus on the boundaries of refugee and forced migration studies and that this remains a vibrant debate that continues to engage scholars. Disengaging from this engagement with received notions of binaries, *Interrogating Forced Migration*, a workshop organized by the Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with the

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Refugee Watch, 45, June 2015

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, the Indian Council of Social Science Research and Taft Foundation, sought to discuss concepts that have emerged in the field of forced migration studies which in its turn could lead to certain methods in pursuing studies in this field. While taking note of the fact that the recent increase in the volume of forced migration worldwide would lead to increasing irrelevance of institutions, norms, and laws as probably also the complex of concepts in the field, the workshop asked why the migrant remains an 'abnormal subject' caught between borders that seem ubiquitous and therefore vulnerable by definition.

'Forced' migration stands in opposition to 'flows' that traditionally defined movement in the region now identified as stretching from Afghanistan to Central and West Asia. Movements of nomadic pastoralist societies but also movements resulting from trade, pilgrimage and conquest marked the landscape of the region since times immemorial. With colonial redrawing of the political map, these everyday movements were sought to be restricted in a variety of ways. Subsequently, sedentarization, the Soviet collectivization campaign, forced deportation of minorities during and after the world wars and the buffer status that Afghanistan had in the 'great game' has traditionally been identified as the cause of forced migration and displacement in the region. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new states a number of other issues have assumed importance in the interpretation of forced migration and refugees. State building processes across the region have left people stateless as they fall outside the definition of citizens (Uzbek brides in Kyrgyzstan), ethnic conflicts have encouraged movements across borders that have subsequently been met by resistance from the host state as upsetting demographic balance (Uzbeks who crossed the border into Kyrgyzstan after 2005) economic imperatives have led to labour migration, in certain cases resentment among displaced peoples have encouraged them to join resistance movements in other parts of the globe (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan joining Islamic State) and environmental degradation has led to displacement (Aral Sea). Most of these movements cannot be comprehended through a statistical approach since the flows escape official census. There is also the trend of the return of the refugee with all the associated institutional issues (the return of Afghan refugees). In certain cases states have actively encouraged return for a variety of political reasons (the Uzbek government have asked for the return of migrants from Russia) and the reluctance towards return has come from the migrants. In other situations refugees have become politically significant for states who wish to replace regimes in neighbouring states or even transform border demarcations (Turkish government is asking for a buffer zone between Turkey and Syria to restrict the movement of Syrian refugees into Turkey). All of these invite new interpretations in the study of forced migration and refugees globally but more particularly in the Central and West Asian regions.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the majoritarian nationalism that gained ground in the Central Asian states jeopardized the ethnic balance. This resulted in the movement of Russian minorities as a response to the anticipated loss of status and politicization of political life. In a number of

cases it also led to statelessness. Large numbers of people with different ethnic backgrounds and holding Soviet documents discovered that new nationality laws of emerging sovereign states left them out of the definition of a citizen though in most cases constitutions recognized all people living within its territorial boundaries as citizens. However, not all of them acceded to UN conventions on refugees and statelessness. This was complicated by the fact that the history of borders in the region is problematic and the territories of the five states are closely interwoven with the existence of a number of enclaves. Post delimitation, the borders were left flexible within a broader system where people shared a common Soviet passport and movement and employment was unrestricted. This, of course, changed in the post 1991 period. In most cases, as in the Ferghana Valley where populations were mixed movements, trade, marriages continued unhindered. Since movement across the borders in the valley did not require documentation old Soviet passports were often not changed to new national ones. From 1999 and particularly since 2005 when borders (like the Uzbek-Kyrgyz or Uzbek-Tajik) were fenced and visa regimes were introduced large numbers of people found themselves stateless. Statelessness is not just the result of circumstances (like the border brides of Central Asia) but also the result of events like riots that leave people without documentation (the Uzbek Kyrgyz riots in Osh). In recent times citizenship rules have been used in Uzbekistan as a political instrument to punish non-compliance with the ruling establishment and passports have been cancelled leaving nationals stranded in third countries.

There is a similar history of movement between, to and from the region that is identified as West Asia today. This history, however, is very different from the complex humanitarian crisis that has been unfolding in recent years leading to growing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons. This migration has affected the social fabric, security, administrative structures and economies of a number of states in the region and has resulted in tragic loss of life. A significant number of those displaced are due to civil wars and insurgency in Syria, Libya, Yemen, South Sudan and Iraq, Somalia as well as the continuing Israel-Palestine conflict, though the largest numbers are now from Syria. Unprecedented violence, identity based persecution and repression has resulted in growing numbers of refugees, who are caught in the cross fire between the Islamic State, the Syrian Kurdish army and states reluctant to host them, and this has added to the conundrum of issues. This is compounded by the insecurity of neighboring states like Turkey whose migration identity has shifted from being a country of emigration and transit to becoming a destination for immigrants and people fleeing conflict and therefore requiring an entirely new regime of legislation to deal with people who are identified as 'guests'. Refugees however are increasingly becoming a political liability in the run up to a closely fought election in Turkey due on 1 November, especially near border towns where Syrians can outnumber locals. A bomb blast in the frontier town of Suruc in July, for which the Islamic State was identified as responsible has increased concern that Turkey's open door policy for the Syrian migrants has made it easier for militants to enter Turkey. Along with a collapse of the Kurdish

cease fire this has increased security concerns. But more than security concerns there remains the problems of integrating a significantly large population with issues like work permit for the migrants remaining unresolved.

In the meantime, the Turkish media has been abuzz with the news that the Turkish military has been asked to create a neutral zone along the 100 km border with Syria which would not only contain the Islamic State but also prevent the creation of a Kurdish state along Turkey's south eastern border and keep the Syrian refugees within the borders of Syria. Syrian Kurdish fighters are now in the offensive in northern Syria and control a long stretch along the Turkish-Syrian border. The refugee crisis is compounded by domestic compulsions of states like Turkey which has battled domestic Kurdish insurgency for decades and has only recently begun negotiations for conciliation and fears the domestic consequences of the creation of a contiguous area under Kurdish control. In the midst of this a human tragedy of unprecedented proportions continues where personal religious beliefs and ethnic affiliations have once again assumed significance.

There is therefore an ongoing debate about how to deal with the crisis with states divided between those who would seek a solution to the conflicts to end migrant movements and others who are looking for a more equitable way to distribute them across Europe. The Pope himself called on every European parish and religious community to take in one migrant family each as a gesture of solidarity and declared that he would start it in the Vatican. However, this as well as debates in Canada and Australia would then revolve around whether this resettlement would be without discrimination based on religion. The European Union today is deeply divided over how to cope with the influx of people from West Asia which is testing the principal of solidarity and making the Union look heartless and ineffective, pitting member states against each other and fuelling populism and anti-Islamic sentiments. The extent of this divide became evident when Germany's Labour and Social Affairs Minister pointed that the migrant crisis could impact upon the 'idea of Europe'.

Hungary, situated in Central Europe and a Schengen passport free zone, has in recent times been seen as a gateway by migrants bound for other parts of Europe. Unfortunately for the migrants, Hungary's negative reaction has been matched by comments made by its Conservative Prime Minister Victor Orban who has clearly indicated that Hungary identifies the Muslim migrants as a threat to Europe's Christian heritage. Orban has accused Germany of encouraging the influx and rejected the European Commission's proposal for mandatory quotas to distribute the migrants throughout the EU. This is probably reflective of the fact that there has always been a 'civilizational' image to the European Union that requires recognition of a system of values shared by all members. It was this, for instance, more than any other administrative requirement that prevented Turkey's entry into the European Union since there is widespread opinion that Turkey as a 'Muslim' country has a different set of traditions and values and a different mentality. It is this lack of 'civilizational' commonality that has made the largely Muslim

migrants unwelcome, not just by the Hungarian state but also large numbers of its people.

Beyond the humanitarian aspects of the crisis is the reality that these massive population shifts are altering the political, economic, social and cultural trajectories of individual states but also the region as a whole. The crisis has generated a new group of impoverished citizens placing the entire region at the risk of radicalization. This security aspect has led to the reluctance of Gulf States to host large numbers of refugees which in its turn has meant that for those fleeing the war choices are limited. States like Lebanon and Jordan are now host to large numbers of refugees. The sheer scale of the crisis means that Lebanon a country with a native population of less than five million now has over one million Syrian refugees. Similarly Jordan a country with a population of less than seven million is hosting over six hundred thousand refugees in addition to eight hundred thousand who already lived there before the crisis. These were countries that were already economically strapped before the crisis and the humanitarian assistance that they are receiving now remains insufficient. While on the one hand this leads to conflict for employment and resources between the locals and the migrants, on the other it is leading to onward movements from transit countries.

The continuing migrant issue, which has gripped public imagination, is today a game changer not just for the states in the region but also for large parts of Europe as also Canada. It has also become the winning card for securing electoral capital. Strategically capitalizing on this discourse is a number of leaders who have been on the receiving end of electoral ire, like the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It was the image of a woman in a red dress being liberally sprayed with gas as she attempted to cross the Gezi Park, that went viral during the days of the Gezi Park protests, and was identified as the turning point in the support for the AKP (Justice and Development Party) and the beginning of the end for the majority it had enjoyed for over a decade. The subsequent loss of majority in Parliament bringing into question President Erdogan's dreams of a Presidential system may now be reversed by the other tragic image of a toddler in a red shirt. Erdogan's support for the migrants and criticism of the EU policy along with demands that EU states now take responsibility for the migrants seems to have struck a chord not just internationally but also within his own country where after a significant time his actions seem to meet with approval. This is important at a time when his decision for snap polls on 1 November, after the parties in Parliament failed to form a coalition government, have been widely criticized as partisan. Will the powerful message in the second image prove to be as decisive as the one generated by the first? This is a question that only the coming months can answer.

This issue of *Refugee Watch* brings together some of the presentations made during the module on *Violence in the Borderlands and Forced Migration II: Central and West Asia* in the course of the workshop and some others that were subsequently commissioned on the subject. The issue begins with a special article by Nergis Canefe on 'Post-Colonial State and Violence: Rethinking the Middle East and North Africa outside the Blindfold of Area Studies', where

she raises questions about the linkage between forced migration and statehood in post-colonial and post-imperial societies. This is followed by an article by Priya Singh on 'A Syrian Exodus: The Case of Lebanon and Jordan' which explores the consequences of the Syrian refugee crisis on the bordering states of Jordan and Lebanon. Suchandana Chatterjee's article on 'Putting the Local Back: Uyghur and Dungan Migrants of Central Asia' talks about how, across generations, Uyghur and Dungan migrants from China have learned to share historical experiences of belonging. The last two articles are on the Afghan scenario. The first by Arpita Basu Roy examines repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan in the post 2001 period in terms of sustainable reintegration in an article entitled 'Returnees in Afghanistan: Impediments to Reintegration'. The second by Anwasha Ghosh on 'Marginality and Migration: The Plight of Persecuted Religious Minorities of Afghanistan' examines the case of Hindu and Sikh minorities of Afghanistan.

Post-Colonial State and Violence: Rethinking the Middle East and North Africa outside the Blindfold of Area Studies

By

Nergis Canefe *

In Lieu of an Introduction A Bridge over Troubled Waters

Many an independence movement in the post-colonial world has unleashed extremely brutal forms of violence, especially against the peasantry and the minorities. Such violence, which has bewildered those with the conviction that statecraft in the Global South has never included orchestrated acts of violence before independence, cannot be explained by vague references to 'culture.' Nor could it be counted as an expression of greed and self-interest of the newly rising classes or ethno-religious communities alone. Instead, orchestrated violence perpetrated by the state, when it is no longer in the hands of the colonial or imperial powers, must be seen in the light of issues that have fomented rebellion and uprisings in the first place. Often, incumbent regimes of the post-colonial era possess a questionable monopoly of power while lacking sufficient legitimacy in the aftermath of the collapse or take-over of the former, colonial or imperial order.

Moreover, post-imperial and post-colonial humanscapes of nationhood have a highly problematic relationship with liberation wars conducted under the banner of a united 'nation.' The term itself begs question in the midst of a canopy of peoples with different loyalties and a relatively dubious conception of citizenship as a form of belonging. This is due to the fact that colonial and imperial histories do not bestow upon the colonized or the dominated 'subjects' a sense of pride and joy in relation to their forced allegiance to the state. In that sense, independence has nothing much to offer to those who are not in a position to declare it in the name of the nation and who have to the means to resort to violence in order to control its results. That precondition translates into military-bureaucratic classes, aristocratic

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elements, westernized bourgeoisie and the elite, and such other conglomerations, who extend the promise of Eden on earth to the suffering masses in return for supporting or taking part in the revolutionary turnover. And yet, however coherent their objectives may appear, and however ideologically sound their methods may be, post-colonial statehood nonetheless reflect a serious societal malaise that needs to be addressed with regard to 'casting out' those who do not befit the grid. That constitutes the essential link between nation building, forced migration and dismemberment. It also is one of the clear points of continuation between colonial/imperial and post-colonial forms of statecraft.

The object of this article is to raise questions concerning this lineage/linkage between forced migration and statehood in post-colonial and post-imperial societies. The main argument is premised on the historical specificity of such societies with a qualifier regarding the common nature of their experiences regardless of the geographical location they inhabit. This common character arises from structural affects and changes brought about by the experience of societal domination and its signature feature of alignment amongst certain classes at the expense of the masses. It is true that discussions on tribalism, sectarianism, regionalism, supposed primordial sentiments and ethno-religious identities have long preempted the understanding of the state as a vessel for social conflict, an economic suzerain and a game stopper for political and class negotiations.¹ This is not to suggest that the state maintains a privileged position as an autonomous social force. However, at least in the Middle East and North Africa, otherwise known as the MENA region in the area studies parlance, the state very seldom exists in the registers of what matters to be studied.² The only exception to this trend is Israeli historical scholarship that compares and contrasts Israel with her neighboring Arab states. That is an interesting turn in post-colonial scholarship indeed, since both the producer of the gaze and the object of the gaze are post-colonial subjects themselves in this instance. However, due to the complicated context within which most Israeli debates on the Middle Eastern state take place, there is only limited applicability for this framework for analyzing statecraft in the Middle East.³ Hence, the work that was done during the late eighties and nineties must be resumed with a renewed zeal and from a wider perspective.

Currently, this lack of focus on the intricacies of statecraft and foundational paradigms of statehood creates and perpetuates blindfolds about post-colonial and post-imperial societies in the region. Content becomes subsumed by the presumed form and changes in the form of the state; the dynamic relationship between histories of governance, creation of new subjectivities and agencies, and suppression of yet others becomes invisible to the area studies scholar. As a result, for instance, institutionalized political movements and grand projects concerning state capability in affecting social change are rarely touched upon in the context of the study of post-colonial and post-imperial statecraft in the region. This blind spot is perhaps best witnessed in the puzzlement that comes with each wave of state-orchestrated or state-sponsored forced migration and mass reshuffling of populations through displacement. Another barely discussed phenomenon is the

superstructure of political and administrative institutions established in this former context of being a colony or a ruled over territory of an empire. The fact that these structures continue their lifecycle in mutated forms and maintain or even increase their overall efficacy in the post-colonial/post-imperial era goes amiss. In particular the special role played by the military-bureaucratic oligarchies, in addition to the fantastic scenarios of liberation and welfare for all developed by nascent bourgeoisie of the nationalist-conservative yoke in orchestrations of mass movements of forced migration and population reshufflings is a very troubling absence in analysis.⁴ Despite the saliency of such phenomenon in the MENA region and beyond, for whichever reason, our keen interest in adhering to the artificial divisions and walls erected by area studies hinders our vision and thus our ability to see such prominent formations and commonalities.

For generations, scholars hid behind the façade that in the specific instance of the Eastern Mediterranean, perhaps the culprit was Islam or rather our inherited perception of what Islam is capable of—in particular, what it does to state-society relations. Seeing Islam as a *tour de force* for collective enforcement of moral litanies easily leads to a common misconception about the Middle East and North Africa and its immediate beyond as a *terra incognita* for a genuine politics of statecraft. If Islam were always there to legitimize, coat and coax the actions of the elite, indeed not much else would be needed assuming that almost entire populations of the region are generically pious.⁵ In the meantime scholarship, as well as critical political debates on the Middle Eastern states, make the siren call of not ‘weak states’ but in fact ‘deep states’ which are far too powerful and sinister for their own sake. The formal resources and bureaucratic institutions of the state across the MENA region are anything but feeble. There is in fact even a ‘civil society’ in the Middle East and it existed much before the celebrated and yet saddening events of the Arab Spring.⁶ Moreover, the public is not limited to the periphery of the mosque and the marketplace as the neo-orientalist or occidentalist yearnings would dictate. Neither are aspirations for a just order limited to fundamentalist plots of complete collapsing of this-worldly desires with the other worldly dictates of a good life. There have always been classes in the Middle East and North Africa, and there have always been bureaucracies.

Just like South Asia, politics of the Middle East and North Africa have never been geographically circumscribed.⁷ Emergence of new political forms and social movements in the region owe their existence not only to internal suppression and exploitation of classes but a carefully crafted story of independence that hides the less than arms-length relationships between local and Metropolitan capitalist classes. Here, my aim is to show that the essential features of the post-colonial/post-imperial set-up in the MENA region invite a fresh analysis of the relationship between statehood and violence, the kind of analysis that has repercussions beyond any specific sub-section of area studies literature in the Global South. After all, who is confined to area studies and who is invited to the ordained benches of disciplinary interventions reveal a lot of about our convictions regarding how we think, imagine and relate to our own societies as academics, activists, writers and public intellectuals from

the Global South.⁸ Seeking to identify lawful regularities and patterns, when it is done in the name of charting the pathways to ‘progress’ or ‘great social transformations’, receives common acceptance as a noble act. Such regularities are not meant to be context-bound though no doubt they would exhibit an admirable degree of historical specificity. In order to advance this agenda pertaining to the seemingly necessary separation between what happens to the West and then what happens to the rest of us either in reaction to, or under the influence of, or simply separate from the unfolding of history in the West, one must first and foremost choose one’s side and proudly embrace an ‘area studies expert’ identity. Unless, of course, accreditation of valid knowledge is not sought after at the usual centers of authority situated in the old Metropolises of the world alone.⁹

A very interesting shift occurs when we do this kind of exercise. Changing the notions of professional merit in knowledge production directly alters the balance of power that kept the global academic order relatively intact when it came to analyzing the events, formations and trends in the Global South. Old field hands situated at the best and oldest academic institutions of Europe and North America lose their claim to sole proprietorship for educating new generations of specialists who really know how to study Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East. Even a new set of standards may emerge as a result. No doubt pressures from outside the academia amplify these changes and underline the broader relevance of the ‘native experience’ untainted by the lens of Orientalist or neo-colonialist schools of thought.

In the following pages, I shall thus propose that the human costs of events that reshaped the demographical make-up of the Middle East under the aegis of the chain of clashes and uprisings dubbed as the Arab Spring are by no means unique to the region, neither are they singularly important in terms of establishing a link between state violence and forced migration in the post-colonial/post-imperial context. This particular cycle of perpetuation of violence against civilians and the accompanying cleansing impulse need to be interpreted in terms of the alignment of the respective interests of the exploiting/dominant classes in the post-colonial/post-imperial context.

In post-colonial and post-imperial states, various strands of the indigenous bourgeoisie, the Metropolitan neo-colonialist bourgeoisies, and the landed/learned classes join hands for a renewed mode of capital accumulation. Under veiled Metropolitan patronage, select classes of the post-independence era unite in their zeal for extracting unduly from the society at large via the subordination of the relatively highly developed colonial State apparatus to their agendas and interests.¹⁰ Exercising dominion over the society and its resources becomes a highly developed political art and leads to the creation of deep and powerful states with strong undertones of nationalist loyalties. Adding to this picture the element of bureaucratic-military oligarchies allows for the mediation of competing but no longer contradictory interests and demands through organized and orchestrated state violence. This context acquires a relatively autonomous force to become the spokesperson of the underclasses and the dispossessed that is not an

instrument of any one of the dominant classes. Such a relatively autonomous role taking a principled position against the state apparatus as well as organized class power had found its embodiment in the suffering and denial of the legitimacy of the post-colonial system by refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the internally displaced. These communities vote on their feet clearly displaying the dangerously dark underbelly of the post-colonial order and its deficits in terms of legitimate representation. Though they may not have defined class interests, the dispossessed in effect challenge the entire system by virtue of not being in a position to negotiate anything with the *status quo*. Although there are no doubt differences between the experience of direct colonial rule and colonial exploitation under indirect rule, in addition to the category of being under imperial domination with limited sovereign administration, it is still possible to formulate a general theory of the state in post-imperial and post-colonial societies without doing injustice to regional specificities. By establishing links between forced migration and the post-colonial/post-imperial state, it is indeed possible to look at both from a much wider lens, above and beyond the constricted view bestowed upon us by area studies.

In the final analysis, this paper provides an overall assessment of migration before and after the uprisings in the Southern Mediterranean. In particular, it reviews state policies regarding forced migration in the MENA region. Notably, migration (forced displacement as well as voluntary flows) to Europe has not been accelerated by the Arab Spring, apart from a short-lived movement from Tunisia, but has simply continued along previous trends. In sharp contrast, migration within the Southern Mediterranean as a region has been deeply impacted by the events as outflows of migrants and refugees fleeing instability and violence in Libya and Syria.¹¹ This is a noteworthy phenomenon in terms of understanding and deciphering global migration flows in the Global South and constitutes fertile grounds for comparison between the Middle East and other regions living under the aegis of post-colonial/post-imperial states such as South Asia.

The Middle Eastern State as a Parable

Let me begin with the proposition that it is indeed possible to include the MENA region and in particular the Middle Eastern state in the rubric of post-coloniality. Though there is the formidable obstacle of Ottoman historiography maintaining that the whole region was once under imperial suzerainty and thus carries the markers of imperial administration rather than colonial rule, there is enough reason to see continuities between the Ottoman and later on French, British and Italian colonial rule that created a critical mass of state-building shaping the post-colonial and post-imperial trends of socio-political change in specific ways. The sheer insistence on bracketing the Middle Eastern state as a genus in as a member of its own class leads to the syndrome of the blind man touching parts of an elephant and trying to understand what kind of an animal he has come across while being lost in amazement and confusion.

Here, a brief diversion on what post-coloniality means is in order. Although discussions about the effects of colonial and imperialist domination are by no means new, the various meanings attached to the prefix 'post' and different understandings of what characterizes the post-colonial continue to make this term a controversial one. Among the criticisms leveled against it, already reviewed comprehensively by Stuart Hall, are the dangers of careless homogenizing of experiences as disparate as those of settler colonies, such as Australia and Canada; of the Latin American continent, whose independence battles were fought in the 19th century; and countries such as India, Nigeria, or Algeria that emerged from very different colonial encounters in the post-World War II era.¹² Still, again as Hall suggests, 'What the concept may help us to do is to describe or characterise the shift in global relations which marks the (necessarily uneven) transition from the age of Empires to the post-independence and post-decolonisation moment.'¹³ Following Ali Rattansi's proposition¹⁴, it also makes sense to make a distinction between post-coloniality to designate a set of historical epochs and related conditions, and, post-colonialist studies to refer to a particular form of intellectual inquiry that has as its defining theme the mutually constitutive role played by the colonizer and the colonized in shaping the identities of both the dominant power and subjects of imperial and colonial projects.¹⁵ Within the field of post-colonial studies itself, further deliberation suggests that, à la Bart Moore-Gilbert there appears to be a divide between post-colonial criticism, which has its antecedents in the writings of those involved in anti-colonial struggles, and post-colonial theory, which distinguishes itself by the incorporation of methodological paradigms derived from contemporary fields of cultural studies and literary theory into discussions of colonial/post-colonial systems of representation and cultural politics.¹⁶ Whatever the various interpretations of the term or the various temporalities associated with it might be, the post-colonial as a suffix signifies a critical interruption into that grand historiographical narratives including Western Marxism allocating a subordinate presence and agency to those who have been colonial and imperial subjects. In what follows, I will attempt a brief discussion of some of the key characteristics of the post-colonial/post-imperial state and interrogate the extent to which this definition lends itself to a meaningful analysis of the contemporary trajectories of social change in the MENA region.

Examination of the political trajectory of Middle Eastern states since the terminal phases of colonial/protectorate period suggests that, by the 1990s, the 'post-colonial' label has lost its pertinence. The term acquired widespread currency immediately after independence movements in acknowledgment of the importation into new states of the practices, routines and mentalities of the colonial state. These no doubt served as a platform for a more ambitious form of political monopoly, whose legitimating twin discourses were nativism and nationalism. In the immediate aftermath of jubilations, the colonial state legacy often decanted into patrimonial autocracies many of which fell into deep crisis of socio-economic legitimacy by the 1980s. The serious erosion of the statehood of Middle Eastern and North African polities by the 1990s then opened the door for a complex web

of civil conflicts and internal warfare. As local communities, dissenting political fractions and marginalized minorities adapted to diminished state presence and service provision on the one hand, and increased military and police-level involvement of the state in the everyday lives and livelihoods of its citizens on the other, what was known as the post-colonial moment of celebratory freedom has passed.¹⁷

Still, this intervention will not present a compilation of definitions and/or theoretical approaches concerning failed, fragile or weak states, nor will it offer recipes or policy recommendations for countering the ills of post-colonial sovereignties. Instead, my intention is to present some food for thought on the general premises that these concepts rely upon and to point out dilemmas and paradoxes that mark the current discourse and practices of statecraft in the Global South. Thus, I start with the question of whether it is the states (in the South) that are failing, or the analysis of these states (undertaken mostly in the North) that is inadequate, misleading or incomplete.¹⁸ Given a situation where statecraft and statehood have rather distinct pedigrees that were introduced to the South through colonial and imperial governance techniques, this question needs to be thoroughly addressed.

Specifically, the central premise of this article is that the politicization and engineering of demography is to be accepted as a key aspect of modern state-building in the Global South, Middle East constituting a prime example for it. For supposedly, only when the people and the state are directly related to each other, the question of who is regarded as the state's legitimate owner could finally be put to rest.¹⁹ Forced displacements and partitions can thus be interpreted as struggles for totalistic claims over the collective goods of the state. Within this framework, historical analysis with a postcolonial spirit could reveal under which conditions state-building leads to an ethnicization of primarily political or class conflicts, rebellions and civil wars. Variations in the extent to which post-colonial state institutions rely upon pre-existing ones account for the incongruence among different regions of the Global South.²⁰ However, the commonalities in the practice of state power and the relative power payoffs to domestic elites of adopting neo-patrimonial policies with a zestful approach to forced displacements and dispossession of communities trump these differences. We must indeed offer substantial qualifications to the 'imported state' hypothesis operative in the Middle East in particular, and across the Global South in general. What we are dealing with is a masterpiece of hybridity, albeit often used to suppress, to dispossess and to erase.

Canonized studies of state building have focused primarily on the European experience, with selective application to cases in the colonial/post-colonial world. The applicability of the predatory theory of the state, derived from the European experiences pertaining to the modernity-capitalism duo, is much wider than anticipated in the context of the postcolonial world. Trajectories of state development in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia indicate that there has been a marked increase in the extractive capacity of the state during the post-colonial era in a manner similar to the experiences of early modern Europe.²¹ This is by no means to suggest

that the Middle Eastern state is five centuries behind its European counterparts. It does however signal a pattern whereby organized political violence becomes the most distinguishing feature of statehood given the demands and insatiable desires of rising classes. Indeed, a broad examination of the political trajectory of post-colonial states as offered by Hamza Alavi, Roger Murray, John Saul and others strongly suggest that the overzealous performances of state bureaucracy constitute a façade for class alliances that keep the state in place as an extraction machine with minimal redistribution.²² Accordingly, the import and genuine adaptation of colonial/imperial mechanisms of sustaining centralized political authority and ordaining market-society relations led to a certain set of practices, mentalities and routines that mark the post-colonial state. Along with the discourses of developmentalism and nativist nationalism, this type of state found its purchase among the hopeful masses that found a place for themselves in its futuristic projections of restored glory and honor. Across the MENA region, the emergent configurations of state power more often than not amorphed into patrimonial autocracies and military dictatorships. Accompanied by a complex web of civil conflicts and wars, perhaps what rendered the Middle Eastern state a parable rather than a paradigmatic example of the post-colonial state is the predominance of the ethno-religious parlance as a language of discontent.²³

State and Violence: Multiple Legacies of Blame-worthiness in the Middle East and North Africa

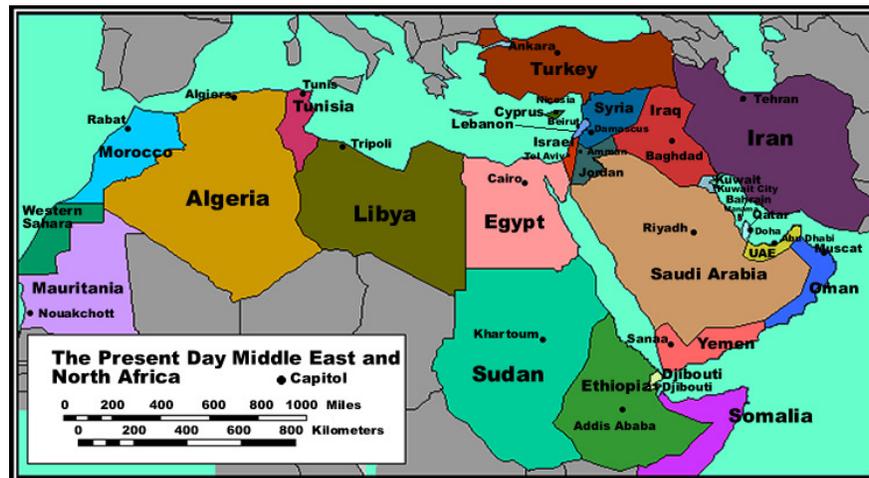


Figure I: Map of Independent nation-states in the Middle East and North Africa (source <http://www.library.illinois.edu/ias/middleeasterncollection/countries.html>)

Though both colonialism and imperialism had a profound and lasting impact on the development of contemporary states in the MENA region, only a select few scholars assess these effects in depth.²⁴ A predominant feature of

the colonial and imperial legacies is ethno-religious conflict in ever changing forms. Despite the pervasiveness of ethno-religious strife in post-colonial states across the board, grievance-based approaches have had only limited success in understanding these conflicts. For instance, the distinctive colonial styles of the British and French created fundamentally different systems of ethno-religious stratification, which left contrasting legacies for post-colonial conflicts.²⁵ Specifically, the indirect, decentralized rule of the British fostered an unranked and fluid system of ethno-religious stratification, while the legacy of the centralized French style approximated a ranked and rigid system. Unranked systems foster competition between marked groups, which can and did readily spiral into long-term conflict over access to resources or privileges vis-à-vis the state. Former French colonies, on the other hand, were left with a heavily centralized bureaucratic power structure that impeded ethno-religious mobilization and authoritatively suppressed even the non-violent challenges, thus leading to separatist and often violent scenarios of conflict and civil war. Looking at the MENA region, one sees the effects of both of these legacies imprinted upon the Ottoman system of administrative hierarchies and creation and suspension of local aristocracies based on their degree of loyalty to the imperial center, as well as fairly rigid demarcation lines that separate communities along the lines of religion more so than anything else. The result is a true multi-dimensionality of potential and actual conflicts in the absence of, or sometimes due to the presence of, a strong nationalist ideology to supplant the post-imperial/post-colonial states in the region.

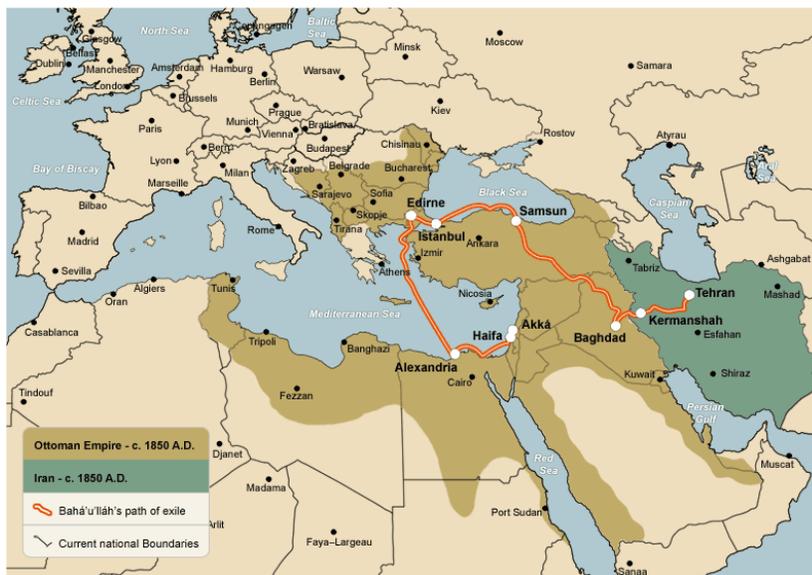


Figure II: Map of Ottoman Rule in the MENA Region
(source <http://uncensored.co.nz/2010/02/04/middle-east-history-colonial-rule-before-world-war-ii/>)

Since the 1970s, a steady chorus of neo-Orientalist scholars trained at the best area studies institutions in North America and Europe insistently

argued that it became abundantly clear that things had gone wrong in the Middle East. Compared with Christendom, the argument goes, the world of Islam had become poor, weak, and ignorant. Supposedly, the primacy of the West was clear for all to see, invading every aspect of Muslim societies' public and private lives. As the argument goes, it is true that modernizers and reformers of the Middle East concentrated their efforts in military, economic, and political revival. Yet none seemingly achieved the desired results of becoming *on par* with the West. Though the new states in the Middle East brought some alleviation to limited elements of the population, and some benefit, they all failed to deliver what they promised—equality, welfare and restored honor to their independent nations. This narrative is the product of a dangerously misguided kind of scholarship at multiple levels. First of all, it presumes that societies in the Middle East are marked solely by Islam—an imprint that cannot be erased despite the passage of almost a millenium. Its inner logic also eradicates the possibility of discussing social change and political upheaval in class terms. Finally, it divides the world into the impossible chasm of Christendom versus Islam as if we are locked into the times of the Crusades, never to be released. Accordingly, all the anger that circled the Middle East is really a form of self-hatred: following behind would have been bad enough but limping in the rear has proven even worse. In this framework of psychologizing post-colonial histories, neo-Orientalism is quick to suggest that what came next is pointing the finger of blame on someone else, namely the former imperial and colonial powers for the ills of Middle Eastern and North African societies. This twist in the all too common narrative of doomed competition with the metropolis renders efforts to employ historical consciousness in terms of paying attention to institutional and ideological continuities in the post-imperial and post-colonial periods practically null.



Figure III: Map of Colonial Rule in the MENA Region
(source <http://www.vox.com/a/maps-explain-the-middle-east>)

The rise of nationalism led to a new economy of communal desires and new perceptions of honor. Prior to the wave of Arab nationalism, Arab societies could lay the blame for their troubles on the Ottomans, who ruled the area for many centuries and then the European colonial rulers. Turks, on the other hand, could lay the blame for the stagnation of their civilization on the dead weight of the Arab past, and, the South East European and non-Muslim Ottomans' [*aka* Armenian, Greek, Arab Christian and Kurdish communities of the Empire] stabbings from the back as the standard Turkish nationalist narrative dictates. The final straw that broke the camel's back of course was the European imperialist designs that devoured the remains of the ill Empire. Persians could lay the blame for the loss of their ancient glories on Arabs, Turks, Mongols and then the Europeans. Everyone had someone else to blame. Nativist nationalisms took that opportunity away, yet only temporarily.

The potent combination of Ottoman rule and British/French/Italian imperialism indeed left formidable structures of domination and administrative oppression behind, across the MENA region. Western political domination, economic penetration, and considered the most insidious of all, cultural influences changed the face of the region and transformed the lives of its people, arousing new hopes and fears, creating new dangers and new expectations about their communal futures. All these hinged upon nationalist dreams, and a centralized state was expected to deliver it all at once. No centralized state could have done this, keeping all constitutive classes of a society simultaneously happy, and the Middle Eastern one could not do it either. Furthermore, there was the issue of who the nation was, and what to do with the myriad minorities in the so-called mosaic of Middle Eastern societies.

Then came the attempt to transfer the guilt to America, along with blaming the Jews for all that goes wrong. Jews in Israel became the sole culprits in terms of the catastrophes that engulfed the Middle East. Regardless of the tyrannical conditions they have created in Occupied West Bank and Gaza, to claim that a few million Jews locked into a European created settler-state should be declared the cause of all ills in the MENA region is somewhat surreal bordering on the Protocols of the Elders of Zion conspiracy. In fact, Middle Eastern societies tended to be dismissive rather than suspicious and obsessive about the Jews until after the Second World War and the creation of the state of Israel. Anti-Semitism and its image of the Jew as a scheming, evil monster provided a soothing antidote for this renewed sense of defeat against the presumed Western plot of giving away part of the Arab lands to the contemptuous and pitiful nation of left-over European Jews. The treatment of Palestinian peoples greatly facilitated the acceptance of the anti-Semitic reinterpretation of the region's history, and led some to attribute all evil in the Middle East to secret Jewish plots. This interpretation then pervaded much of the public discourse in the region, including that seen in education, the media, and even entertainment.

All in all, state cadres, military, rising classes, elites, discontented masses and disenfranchised peasantry all had someone to blame for the

demise of the MENA region despite the emergence of new nation-states in the post-Ottoman and post-imperial period from 1918 onwards.²⁶ The backdrop to this sense of injustice was the knowledge that for most of the Middle Ages it was neither the older cultures of the Orient nor the newer cultures of the West that were the major centers of civilization and progress, but the world of Islam. It is through the Persian and Ottoman Empires that governments and societies achieved a degree of freedom of thought and expression that led persecuted Jews and even dissident Christians to flee Europe for refuge in the Middle East. If so, Islam was not an obstacle to freedom, to science, to economic development, as Muslim Empires of the past were pioneers in all three areas. And if so, the current day failures and shortcomings of the modern Middle East and North Africa must have been afflicted upon these lands because they adopted alien notions, institutions, identities and practices. The curse must have fallen upon those who strayed away from the authentic and the traditional. Those known as modernists or reformers no doubt found the cause of this loss of grandeur not in the abandonment but in the stubborn retention of old ways combined with the inflexibility and ubiquity of the Islamic clergy and elites blocking the way to creative and progressive change in accordance with the needs of the times.

In examining the incidence of state 'malfunction' in the Global South, two central themes emerge, one concerned with the search for causalities and the other concerned with restorative responses.²⁷ There is often a misplaced tendency to look for single causes and explanations of state collapse or tyranny-like behavior, constituting two poles of the same spectrum of 'excess.' Instead, in the case of the Middle Eastern state for instance, what is called for is a more nuanced and historicized scrutiny that differentiates the factors leading to organized forms of societal and/or state-sponsored violence. In other words, we must examine patterns across the post-colonial/post-imperial world and take our clues from there rather than going deeper and deeper into the mystical world of religion and culture as the main harbingers of life in the region. If so, instances of state failure, collapse or excess could be addressed within the broader context of the evolution of statehood in the Global South.²⁸ Largely a product of European colonialism and imperialism, and adopted as a global norm during the processes of decolonization, the post-colonial/post-imperial state inherited all the structural difficulties of state legitimacy, maintenance of loyalties, and securing class alliances and more from its colonial and imperial counterparts. Poor, displaced, dispossessed and dispersed peoples of the newly independent states of the twentieth century have found the demands of loyalty to these supposedly new states especially burdensome.²⁹ Indeed, consecutive waves of forced migration movements and population displacements reveal the hollowness of existing models of sovereign statehood in its post-colonial mold, and challenged the triple narratives on which the project of modern statehood has long depended: the narratives of security, legitimate representation, and, redistribution of wealth and welfare. While individual cases of state failure or collapse may owe much to specific circumstances, they must also be understood within the context of a world in which maintaining states has become increasingly intertwined with

the cleansing and reordering of populations in order to create a semblance of order.

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Forced Migration as a Management Tool for Dissent

Since the nineteenth century reshuffling of borders, every society in the MENA region has witnessed large migratory movements, both internally and across changing borders. The majority of the displaced were forced out by conflicts and civil wars, sometimes under the aegis of bilateral treaties and other times under conditions that amount to crimes against humanity. Contrary to the common misconceptions, Palestinians do not constitute the largest group to have been displaced in this region any more.³⁰ The original number of Palestinians who left their homelands is much smaller than the Iraqi or Syrian refugees and asylum seekers produced by waves of warfare in the region during the last three decades.³¹

The term Palestinian refugee originally included both Arabs and Jews whose normal place of residence was in Mandatory Palestine under the British rule but who were displaced and lost their livelihoods as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Today, the term primarily refers to the patrilineal descendants of persons who meet UNRWA's Palestine Refugee criteria. In 2012, the number of registered patrilineal descendants of the original definition was estimated to be 4,950,000, of which an estimated 1,5 million live in permanent UNRWA camps. The number of original refugees meeting the UNRWA criteria has declined from 711,000 in 1950 to approximately 30,000 to 50,000 in 2012. Of the close to five million Palestinian refugees today, it is thus about one percent of the population who were classified as first generation refugees.³² This is due to two factors. On the one hand, in 1948 and then again in 1967, most of the Palestinian population of current-day Israel were displaced to West Bank, Gaza and the surrounding countries of Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan. With the passage of more than half a century, many of the original refugees died and some of their descendants accrued citizenship in neighboring countries. Still, they remain the world's largest unsettled refugee population mainly amassed in long-term camps. Their numbers may not be as large as Syrians or Iraqis who are currently displaced but these new waves of refugees and asylum seekers are scattered throughout the region and are generally not hosted in camps on a semi-permanent basis.

Today, one in six Iraqis is displaced. After a conflict that has now lasted as long as the WWI, over two million Iraqis are in exile and a further two million are internally displaced. Most Iraqi refugees are in Syria and Jordan—the latter hosting the largest number of refugees per capita of any country on earth.³³ The vast majority of Iraqi and Syrian displaced peoples survive with little or no assistance from the international community. Almost two decades later, eight million Iraqis are still in need of humanitarian assistance. The government of Iraq lacks the capacity to respond to the crisis and inflexible funding mechanisms stand in the way of adequate support for

agencies that are better able to assist vulnerable Iraqi communities. The situation for the Syrians is even worse. Almost 7 million displaced people inside Syria make this the largest IDP crisis in the world, with possibly also the largest number of people who are 'trapped'. In addition, the number of refugees from Syria continues to increase on a daily basis, coming closer to 2,5 million by April 2015.³⁴ Syrian exodus is, at least to a degree, related to the Arab Spring, but the Iraqi one is not.

Still, it is true that with the Arab spring, between Syria, Libya and Egypt, more than 15 million asylum seekers spilt out of their homelands, many of them never to return.³⁵ A further 33.3 million people became internally displaced within their own war-torn countries, forcing many of them to cross the border to whichever destination available and further. Complicating the picture even more is the scale of unrest in the Middle East in general, including in the countries in which asylum seekers originally seek sanctuary. In Egypt, up to 300,000 refugees from the Syrian war were initially welcomed with open arms. However, after Cairo's regime change in the summer of 2013, the atmosphere turned sour and led to institutional xenophobia against the Syrians followed by arrests and detentions of those who did not carry the correct residency paperwork. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that more than 45,000 migrants risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean to reach Italy and Malta in 2013 alone. Of those, at least 700 died during the journey. The number of the journey-dead rose more than four times for the same route and reached 3,224 in 2014. It continued to rise in the first half of 2015. Jordan and Lebanon now house more than 1 million Syrian refugees. Their presence has created an unprecedented strain on national resources, leading to the Lebanese government tightening restrictions on Syrians entering the country. Turkey is the only country where Syrians are integrated into the labor market with embellished rights for asylum seekers. However, the way the Syrians are treated in Turkey is very similar to the way Turks were once treated in Germany cheap, disposable labor with attached socio-cultural stigma and alienation in addition to severe economic hardship. Libya, another major point on the migration route from the Middle East and North Africa, is now producing its own waves of forced migration. It is no longer a safe haven after the eruption of the civil war in 2011. The plight of refugees there, as well as across the region, makes a mockery of those who suggest the wave of migration is caused by economic reasons. After every outbreak of violence and repression, there is a new wave of people from the area that has just experienced the conflict.

Overall, the MENA region is now host to the largest refugee population in the world, estimated by the US Committee for Refugees at 5,289,400 million back in 2003, reaching up to 15 million at the first quarter of 2015.³⁶ As already mentioned, there are of course many millions more subjected to forced population movements including the internally displaced, and those forced to move for economic or environmental reasons induced by privatization and liberalization schemes.³⁷ While the exact number of such migrants cannot be determined, it is likely to be significantly larger than

projections made on the basis of standardized, strict definitions. What is important to remember at this juncture is that prior to the Arab Spring, the Arab states have already witnessed vast refugee population flows out of Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, into Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.³⁸ Although there are conventions tying countries to accept refugees and provide them protection, such as to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, about half the countries in the Arab world are not signatories to these conventions. This list of non-signatories includes Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Libya. In other words, while Middle Eastern states regularly accept refugees and asylum seekers, they do so without adjacent rights. Non-Arab states like Turkey and Iran, on the other hand, constitute a category on their own. Both of these post-imperial states have long been regional hubs for arrival of dispossessed populations from surrounding territories. They are also known for massive displacements within their own borders and forced population exchanges throughout their history as states. The Turko-Greek forced population exchange is just but one example.

At this point, I have to question the way we often deal with forced migration in academia. Needless to say, the role forced-migrants play in the social and economic fabric of their host societies is manifold.³⁹ Yet equally important is the role they play in the sustenance of otherwise faulty and oppressive political patronage embraced by the post-colonial/post-imperial state. If we continue to turn a blind eye to the brutal regimes of demographic engineering modern statehood relies upon, our ways of making sense of the world are becoming increasingly compromised. Joining the dots and lines together and becoming aware of the patterns of forced migration, displacement and dispossession are essential practices for a thorough reassessment of migration in the Global South. Similarly, if people and communities are not forced by the violent or persecutory actions of their state to seek protection elsewhere but feel compelled to leave their home due to structural inequalities, natural disasters or endemic poverty, prejudice, segregation and insecurity, questioning the extent they could be considered forced migrants is an outdated mode of inquiry. Widening our analytical vision beyond standardized definitions of forced migration as well as historicizing our understanding of successive and regionalized waves of forced migration is the first step towards dealing with the intricacies of statecraft in the MENA region in a holistic way. To illustrate this point with the vividness it deserves, let's try to image what today's states and societies in the region looked like prior to some of the more recent events of mass expulsion of civilian populations.

To start with Iraq, though the current emphasis is on the post-Allied Force invasion exodus of mainly Sunni and Christian Iraqis, massive waves of demographic engineering started with the 1991 uprisings in Iraq. These were a series of popular rebellions in northern and southern Iraq that occurred in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Often referred to as the Sha'aban Intifada among the Arabs and as the National Uprising among the Kurds, they were a

response to the Baathi state's systemic social repression of Shia and Kurdish Iraqis. In their aftermath, nearly two million Iraqis, 1.5 million of them Kurds, escaped from strife-torn cities to the mountains along the northern borders, into the southern marshes, and to Turkey and Iran. By April 1991, the UNHCR estimated that about 750,000 Iraqi Kurds had fled to Iran and 280,000 to Turkey, with 300,000 more gathered at the Turkish border. Though this exodus was sudden and chaotic with thousands of desperate refugees fleeing on foot or crammed onto open-backed trucks and tractors, very few returned back.⁴⁰ The victims of the exodus were gunned down by the Republican Guard helicopters, deliberately strafing columns of fleeing civilians--an act that clearly constituted a crime against humanity. Numerous refugees were also killed or maimed by stepping on land mines planted by Iraqi troops near the eastern border during the long war with Iran.

Many Shia refugees fled to Syria, where thousands of them settled in the town of Sayyidah Zaynab and inside the Turkish border, their numbers mounting to hundreds of thousands. Iraqi Kurds were first settled in refugee camps inside Iraqi and Turkish borders. Faced with the meagerness of life in exile, some of the displaced Kurds have returned to Iraq, where they have been forced to live in government-planned and policed new settlements. Estimates of how many Kurds were compelled to live in these newly built communities, distant from their original homes, range from a conservative million to more than 1,5 million. Some of the returnees have been arrested, executed or "disappeared." Iran and Turkey traditionally absorbed large refugee influxes, such as the Bulgarian Turks and the Afghan refugees, into their economies with relative ease. However, neither have done so for the Iraqi Kurds, since both countries already have significant Kurdish populations of their own and are apprehensive about increasing their numbers. All four of the principal countries of refuge for the Iraqi Kurds -- Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Greece -- have tried to unload the problem onto others. Iraqi Kurds surviving massacres, genocidal attacks, chemical warfare and mass exodus many times over somehow survived their ordeal to declare a semi-autonomous zone of Iraqi Kurdistan today. In effect, the exodus of the 1991 created the basis for Kurdish self-rule. In 1992, Kurdish major political movements established the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, which then became a self-ruling region after the ratification of the Constitution of Iraq in 2005.

This is a true story of perseverance and survival, though not every Iraqi who has become the subject of forced migration has had such a lucky turn of events. The exodus of Middle Eastern Christians from Iraq is a case in point. The mass flight and expulsion of Assyrian Christians was initiated from the beginning of Iraq Civil War in 2003.⁴¹ Leaders of the community estimate that over two-thirds of the Iraqi Assyrian population have already fled the country or have been internally displaced since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Whole neighborhoods of Assyrians have been cleared out from the cities of Baghdad and Al-Basrah, and both Sunni and Shi'ite insurgent groups and militias have been engaged in the displacement and dispossession of Assyrian Christians. Following the campaign of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant

in northern Iraq in August 2014, one quarter of the remaining Iraqi Assyrian Christians fled the Jihadists, finding refuge in Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. The violence faced by Assyrians has led to a drop in their numbers in Iraq from 1.5 million in 2003 to under 300,000 by 2014. The UN High Commission for Refugees estimated in 2007 that one third of 1.8 million were Assyrian Christians. A similar percentage of the 1.6 million internally displaced within Iraq in 2007 were likely Assyrian Christian, many of whom had fled Baghdad, Basra and Mosul for Northern Iraq, only to be displaced yet again.⁴²

Moving onto Turkey, back in 1914, only nine years before the declaration of the Republic of Turkey as a successor state to the Ottoman Empire, close to half of the population of the Asia Minor were of non-Muslim by religious affiliation.⁴³ By 1924, only a handful of these communities remained alive and in their historical homes. There are two major events that led to such a reshuffling. The first one is the mass killings and exile of Anatolian Armenians, an event otherwise known as the Armenian genocide. The second one is the cleansing of Asia Minor Greeks en masse, either through violence or via the forced population exchange dictated by the Turkish State and organized under the authority of international agencies.⁴⁴ Of these two, I shall briefly look at the latter one as the former is already widely known and studied. The systematic ethnic cleansing of the Ottoman Greek population from their historic homelands in Asia Minor was completed during a relatively short period of a decade, roughly between 1914 and 1924. It was originally instigated by the government of the Ottoman Empire against the Christian populations of the Empire and it included massacres, forced deportations involving death marches, summary expulsions, arbitrary arrests and removals, confiscations of land and property, and the destruction of the Christian Orthodox cultural, historical, and religious monuments. Most of the refugees and survivors fled to Greece, amounting to over a quarter of the prior population of Greece at the time. Some, especially those in Eastern provinces, took refuge in the neighboring Russian Empire, and later on moved onto the New World. By the end of the 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish War, Greeks of Asia Minor had become largely extinct except a very small group remaining in Istanbul. Those remaining were then transferred to Greece under the terms of the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, formalizing the forced exodus and stripping Greeks of Asia Minor from having any claim on their land, property or former citizenship.

The story of modern Turkish statehood includes other such episodes of mass forced migration and exile as well, the most widely known one related to the Ottoman Armenians of Asia Minor.⁴⁵ Turkey is the successor state of the Ottoman Empire, and its official policy on the Armenian Genocide is the denial of its occurrence. Whereas the convening of courts-martial to try the Young Turks for war crimes by the post-World War I Ottoman government amounted to an admission of guilt on the part of the Ottoman state, the successor Nationalist government based in Ankara rejected Turkish responsibility for the acts committed against the Armenian population. In fact, the Republic of Turkey obtained a series of concessions from France and England specifically absolving the post-imperial Turkish state from any future

political or material responsibility vis-à-vis the surviving Armenians. These concessions were formalized in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. In this sense, the Treaty of Lausanne legitimized the late-Ottoman/Turkish Nationalist program of ethnic consolidation by expelling, cleansing or repressing minorities in order to create a new nation-state. It reversed the terms agreed upon by the Ottoman Empire in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres that had legally obligated the Ottoman government to bring accused war criminals to justice. It also provided the legal platform for the transfer of populations between Greece and Turkey thus completing the forced exodus of the Ottoman Greeks from Asia Minor.⁴⁶

As a final group which did not fit the mold of Turkish nationalism, Kurds of Turkey have been subjected to a various policies of Turkification and that failing, forced migration. Kurdish was banned in 1924 and Kurdish ethnic identity was officially denied by the Turkish state until the 1980s. By forcefully promoting Turkism, in the aftermath of the cleansing of Ottoman Armenians and Greeks, the Republican Turkish Ankara government continued to strive for the creation of an ethnically homogeneous Turkish state. In the course of the following decades its treatment of the remnant minorities oscillated from neglect to repression. As Turkey remained neutral during World War II and continued trading with Nazi Germany until nearly the end of the war, the Republican state used the occasion of the world crisis to impose extraordinary taxes upon remaining Greeks, Jews and Armenians in Asia Minor. The discriminatory exactions economically ruined these small minority communities already confined mostly to Istanbul by the 1940s. In a more violent episode, such as the 1955 rampage in Istanbul, the government encouraged the expulsion of the majority of Greeks remaining in Turkey. Many Jews emigrated to Israel as a result as well, and the Armenian population dwindled from an estimated 150,000 after World War I to less than half that number by the 1990s. The estimated tally of displaced Kurds of Turkey between 1980s and today is ranging between 4 to 6 million, which makes approximately one third of their total population of 15 million in Turkey.⁴⁷

Since the 1970s, the Turkish state waged a campaign to prevent official recognition of the Armenian Genocide or the adoption of commemorative legislation in countries such as the United States and Canada by threatening to cancel business contracts and reduce levels of military cooperation. Turkey has also sponsored publications challenging the basic facts of the Armenian Genocide in a well-financed and state-orchestrated campaign. Turkey's overseas embassies have been engaged as its primary instruments for the dissemination of this denial literature. Turkey's policy of denial has had an obstructionist character as well. For example, Turkey continues to interfere in the construction of memorial monuments by Armenian diaspora communities abroad. Furthermore, the Turkish state rehabilitated the Young Turk criminals by according them posthumous honors and reburials. It has repatriated the remains of the masterminds of the Armenian Genocide, Ottoman General Talat from Nazi Germany in 1943 and Ottoman General Enver from Tajikistan in 1996 after the breakup of the

Soviet Union. Indicative of the destructive dimension of denial and the policy of erasing the record of a once-Armenian presence in Turkey, historical Armenian structures ranging from thousand-year-old churches to entire ancient cities have been subjected to complete obliteration. Today, no archeological site in Turkey is permitted the designation as historically Armenian and all place names have been changed into new Turkish names.

Perhaps these historical events look small in size and less significant in their effects compared to the exodus of civilians during and in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. It is true that at present, more than 11 million Syrians are either displaced from their homes inside the country, or have fled across the border. However, each of them was an important or sometimes essential building block of a new regime of statehood at the time. Furthermore, they were either declared as an absolute necessity or totally denied in their significance in the aftermath, a kind of reaction that reveals much more than what it hides. Coming back full circle, post-colonial and post-imperial states in the MENA region have heavily relied upon forced migration as a management tool for suppressing and eradicating dissent. As already mentioned, the general conception is that Palestinians constitute the only sizable refugee community in the Middle East, while the rest of the forced migration movements have been sporadic and much smaller in volume. The above-mentioned figures clearly prove otherwise, though this is not to reduce the significance of the Palestinian suffering in the region.

In summary, dispossession of peoples has come to be a defining feature of life in the MENA region throughout its post-independence history.⁴⁸In this essay I attempted to intertwine two seemingly distinctive historiographies pertaining to statehood, postcolonial and Middle Eastern. I did so by addressing how the relationship between statehood and forced migration figure so dominantly in the making and management of sociopolitical identities in the Global South as a common feature. In conjunction, I proposed two interventions: on the one hand, I called for paying attention to the analytic convergences in the treatment of forced dispossession of peoples in the making and sustenance of states; on the other, I underlined the need for the recognition of the distinctive conceptual commitments and political investments that identify post-colonial statehood not as a separate disciplinary venture and analytical domain but as part and parcel of the global history of capitalist accumulation.

As already mentioned, I use the term post-colonial/post-imperial state somewhat in a generic sense. Some scholars use the term postcolonial to signal a cross-disciplinary political project, akin to cultural studies, that rejects colonial categories and Orientalist scholarship. Others retain the term in order to underscore a serious concern for the local and labor histories of formerly colonized societies while acknowledging the continuities in the political, economic, and cultural landscape in which once-subjugated populations now live. I am of the opinion that it is also possible to treat colonialism and imperialism as histories of the present, to focus on the aftermath of empire and on contemporary hybrid metropolitan cultural and political forms that emanate from it.⁴⁹ Here, I go back and forth between these several takes on

postcoloniality. In the end, all of the above designations indicate a concern with the politics of scholarship, and, knowledge production and dissemination. The corruption, the grotesquerie, the complicities, the cult of the leader, the systematic elimination of autonomous or critical groups on the left as well as the right, the sedimenting of new class alliances and power dispositions always centering upon the possession of the state often cited as staple characteristics of the Middle Eastern state do not suffice to erasure of our responsibility and commitment in understanding what brought it to life in the first place.

Conclusion: Forced Migration as a Form of Organized Violence

I will conclude my paper with a reiteration of my call for greater conceptual precision in our analyses of the relationship between post-coloniality and violence, for both academics and activists. The great demographic transitions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries have shifted the locus of population movements from the global North to the global South. This recalibration also necessitated that recent work on neoliberalism, despite its global relevance, is 'provincialized' in order to create intellectual space for alternative ideas that may be more relevant to the changes and events in the Global South where the majority of the population movements take place.⁵⁰ To this end, we must explore in earnest bodies of work that address issues of global and historical injustice. For instance, there is a significant amount of practice and social activism related literature on poverty and its amalgamation into a resurgent force focused on the right to the city in line with such an aspiration.⁵¹ A related theoretical framework that could form a counterpoint to the neoliberal discourse on globalization and subsequent homogenization of populations is the debate on the postcolonial state in its myriad forms. Indeed, if the state is made to be an important component in the analysis of the Global South, all sorts of initiatives would emerge, giving substantially greater attention to understanding historical change about hitherto under-researched dimensions of politics of everyday life.⁵²

One often comes to an analysis skewed towards what may be called 'Third Worldism' through an historical critique of the liberal development project.⁵³ In this context, Third Worldism could be described as a moment in a broader series of resistances to capital accumulation, colonial logic of governance, and, to the techniques used by the post-colonial/post-imperial states to maintain the already existing rules of hegemony. Viewing the Global South in this wider context enables us to explain the failure of post-colonial states to fully deliver their vision of emancipation from colonialism and the violent measures the post-colonial states took in order to sustain their reign. It also equips us with a richer insight about the possibilities of contemporary resistance to the world capitalist order in its embodiments in the Global South. The theory and practice of development depends on a certain kind of bio-politics, rooted in a particular regime of sovereign state control, and designed to mobilize and mold citizens in ways favorable to capital accumulation. Contemporary resistances to neoliberalism have recognized the

complicity of the post-colonial/post-imperial state with global capital. Concomitantly, there is even the possibility of the emergence of 'new internationalisms' arising from the ashes of Third Worldism, with an altered understanding of 'sovereignty' that challenges the trajectory of the post-colonial state.

A major consequence of the new global restructuring in the Global South has been the contradictory helix of integration and legalization, on the one hand, and social exclusion and informalization, on the other. These processes have meant further growth of a marginalized and deinstitutionalized subaltern in many of the metropolises of the world. How do these disposed populations including but not limited to denizens, stateless, precarious laborers and urban grassroots, mostly made of underclasses and minorities of the post-colonial/post-imperial state respond to these endemic trends of marginalization and exclusion? What form of politics do they espouse? Critically navigating through the prevailing perspectives including the culture of poverty, survival strategy, new social movements and everyday forms of resistance, it is indeed possible to argue that the global restructuring is reproducing colonial subjectivities in post-colonial settings in the form of marginalized and deinstitutionalized groups. The unemployed, homeless, marginal, seasonal, precarious and casual labor, street subsistence workers, street children, refugees and asylum seekers, illegal migrants and trafficked communities redefine the humanscapes of the postcolonial state.⁵⁴ As a result, a new terrain of political struggles emerged that current theoretical perspectives cannot fully account for. An alternative outlook, such as a 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary', might be useful to examine the subaltern subjectivities across the Global South. This conversation has to include the analysis of the post-colonial/post-imperial state as a nexus that engages in regular forms of organized violence leading to mass human displacements.⁵⁵ The analysis presented here was based on the experiences of the state in the MENA region. However, it is indeed possible to argue that the paradigmatic Middle Eastern state is not an archaic monstrosity but simply one of the many examples of the post-colonial/post-imperial state that is capable of reorganizing the life worlds of the masses that are not gainful participants of the independence projects across the Global South.

Notes

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²Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006 (Third Edition).

³Gabriel Ben-Dor, 'Ethnopolitics and the Middle Eastern State', *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East*, pp. 71-94; Amatzia Baram, 'Territorial Nationalism in the Middle East', *Middle Eastern Studies* 26.4, 1990, pp. 425-448; Nazih Ayubi, 'The Political Revival of Islam: The Case of Egypt', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12.04, 1980, pp. 481-499 and his *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London and New York: IB Tauris, 1996.

⁴ Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism*, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Pierre Englebert, 'Pre-colonial Institutions, Post-colonial States, and Economic Development in Tropical Africa,' *Political Research Quarterly*, 53.1, 2000, pp. 7-36.

⁵ Nazih N Ayubi, 'The Political Revival of Islam: The Case of Egypt' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12.4, 1980, pp. 481-499.

⁶ Nada AlMaghlouth et al, "Who Frames the Debate on the Arab Uprisings? Analysis of Arabic, English, and French Academic Scholarship," *International Sociology*, 30.4, 2015, pp 418-441.

⁷ Augustus Richard Norton (ed.), *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Vol. 2. Leiden, New York, Koln: Brill, 2001.

⁸ Robert H Bates, 'Area Studies and the Discipline: A Useful Controversy?', *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 30.2, 1993, pp. 166-169; Robert H Bates, Chalmers Johnson, and Ian Lustick, 'Controversy in the Discipline: Area Studies and Comparative Politics,' *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 30.2, pp. 166-169.

⁹ See Hamza Alavi, 'India and the Colonial Mode of Production', *Economic and Political Weekly*, X.33-35, 1975, pp. 1235-1262 and his 'The State in Post-colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh', *New Left Review*, 74.1, 1972, pp. 59-81.

¹⁰ Ananya Mukherjee Reed, 'Regionalization in South Asia: Theory and Praxis', *Pacific Affairs*, 70.2, 1997, pp. 235-251 and her edited book titled *Corporate Capitalism in Contemporary South Asia: Conventional Wisdoms and South Asian Realities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2003.

¹¹ Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 'Invisible Refugees and/or Overlapping Refugeedom? Protecting Sahrawis and Palestinians Displaced by the 2011 Libyan Uprising', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 24.2, 2012, pp 263-293.

¹² Stuart Hall, 'When was "the Post-Colonial"? Thinking at the Limit,' *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996. P. 246.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ali Rattansi, 'Postcolonialism and its Discontents', *Economy and Society*, 26.4, 1997, pp. 480-500.

¹⁵ Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (eds), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell and Wiley, 2000.

¹⁶ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, London: Verso, 1997.

¹⁷ Crawford Young, 'The End of the Post-colonial State in Africa? Reflections on Changing African Political Dynamics,' *African Affairs*, 103.410, 2004, pp. 23-49.

¹⁸ Volker Boege, Anne Brown, Kevin Clements and Anna Nolan, 'On Hybrid Political Orders and Emerging States: What is Failing—states in the Global South or Research and Politics in the West?' *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation Dialogue Series 8* (2009): 15-35.

¹⁹ Young, 'The End of the Post-colonial State in Africa?'

²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, New York: Routledge, 1990; Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the " Post-Colonial"', *Social Text*, 1992, pp. 99-113; Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (eds.), *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*.

²¹ Cameron G Thies, 'State Building, Interstate and Intrastate Rivalry: A Study of Post Colonial Developing Country Extractive Efforts, 1975–2000', *International Studies Quarterly*, 48.1, 2004, pp. 53-72.

²² This is a 1970s debate that still has resonance for our understanding of the post-colonial state today. See Roger Murray, 'Second Thoughts on Ghana', *New Left*

Review, 42, 1967, pp. 25-39; Hamza Alavi, 'The State in Post-colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh', *New Left Review*, 74.1, 1972, pp. 59-81. Leys is particularly concerned to open a debate on John Saul's 'The State in Post Colonial Societies: Tanzania', published in *The Socialist Register*. See Colin Leys, 'The "Overdeveloped" Post Colonial State: A Re-evaluation,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 3. 5, 1976, pp. 39-48 and John S. Saul, 'The State in Post-colonial Societies: Tanzania,' *Socialist Register*, 11.11, 1974, pp 349-372.

²³Roger Owen, *State Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*.

²⁴Juan Ricardo Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's Urabi Movement*, Cairo: American Univ in Cairo Press, 1999; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

²⁵Robert T. Blanton, David Mason and Brian Athow, 'Colonial Style and Post-colonial Ethnic Conflict in Africa', *Journal of Peace Research*, 38.4, 2001, pp. 473-491.

²⁶The dates of the establishment of key independent nation-states in the MENA region is as follows: Republic of Iran 1921; Egypt, 1922; Republic of Turkey, 1923; Kingdom of Iraq, 1932; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1932; Arab Republic of Syria, 1945/1963; Lebanon, 1943; Hashemite Kingdom of TransJordan, 1946; Republic of Yemen, 1947; State of Israel, 1948; Kingdom of Libya, 1951; Morocco, 1956; Cyprus, 1960; Chad, 1960; Algeria, 1962.

²⁷Martin Doornbos, 'State Collapse and Fresh Starts: Some Critical Reflections', *Development and Change*, 33.5, 2002, pp. 797-815; Mark Beissinger and M. Crawford Young (eds), *Beyond State Crisis? Post-colonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002; Crawford Young, 'The End of the Post-colonial State in Africa? Reflections on Changing African Political Dynamics,' *African Affairs*, 103.410, 2004, pp 23-49.

²⁸Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause, 'State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies,' *Development and Change*, 33.5, 2002, pp. 753-774.

²⁹Christopher Clapham, 'The Challenge to the State in a Globalized World,' *Development and Change*, 33.5, 2002, pp. 775-795.

³⁰This is despite the claim made by the respected Palestinian refugee scholar Sari Hanafi on the subject. In terms of actual numbers in 2015, Syrians resumed the unglorious throne of 'the largest group of dispossessed people' in the Middle East. See Hanafi (2014) for his description of forced migration tallies in the MENA region, which concentrates mainly on Palestinians and Kurds as predominantly dispossessed groups.

³¹For the total number of displaced Palestinians displaced, Iraqis and Syrians, see respective UNHCR sites at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/>.

³²Terry M Rempel, 'Who are Palestinian Refugees?', *Forced Migration Review*, 26, 2006, pp. 5-7.

³³See <http://www.fmreview.org/iraq#sthash.AvH09QEa.dpuf>.

³⁴See <http://www.fmreview.org/syria#sthash.IacNpWQt.dpuf>.

³⁵Amin Saikal and Amitav Acharya (eds), *Democracy and Reform in the Middle East and Asia: Social Protest and Authoritarian Rule After the Arab Spring*, 72, London and New York: IB Tauris, 2013.

³⁶For further references for refugees in the Middle East and numbers, see http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/regions/egypt_themiddleeast.html

³⁷Karen Bakker, 'The "Commons" Versus the "Commodity": Alter-globalization, Anti-privatization and the Human Right to Water in the Global South,' *Antipode*, 39.3, 2007, pp. 430-455.

³⁸ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, London and New York: IB Tauris, 1996; Sari Hanafi, Jad Chaaban and Karin Seyfert, 'Social Exclusion of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Reflections on the Mechanisms that Cement their Persistent Poverty,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 31.1, 2012, pp. 34-53.

³⁹Just as an example, until the mid-1950s, Egypt was largely a country of immigration. However, with the oil boom in the Arab Gulf countries and the resulting demand for labor, emigration to the Gulf States took over as the dominant trend. In terms of sheer numbers, an estimated 2.7 million Egyptians live outside of Egypt but in the Middle East. In addition, over 5 million Egyptians moved internally to survive poverty in the rural hinterlands. For further debate, see Grabska Katarzyna, 'Who Asked them Anyway? Rights, Policies and Wellbeing of Refugees in Egypt,' *Forced Migration and Refugee Studies*, American University in Cairo, Egypt, 2006.

⁴⁰For a detailed and historical discussion see Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005. There are many other publications on the Kurds of the Middle East, but often the authors avoid in-depth discussion of Kurdish refugee populations' faith and impact.

⁴¹Kelly O'Donnell and Kathleen Newland, 'The Iraqi Refugee Crisis: The Need for Action,' *Migration Policy Institute*, 2008, pp. 1-24.

⁴² Mohamed Kamel Dorai, 'Iraqi Refugees in Syria,' *Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Africa*, The Forced Migration & Refugee Studies Programme, American University of Cairo. <http://www.aucegypt.edu/GAPP/cmrs/Documents/MohamedDorai.Pdf>;

Kristin Dalen and Jon Pedersen, 'Iraqis in Jordan Their Number and Characteristics,' Oslo: Fafo, 2007.

⁴³Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2004.

⁴⁴FatmaMüge Göçek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era*, 103, London and New York: IB Tauris, 2011.

⁴⁵ In an effort to address these forgotten displacements, the International Association of Genocide Scholars passed a resolution in 2007 declaring the Ottoman campaign against Christian minorities of the Empire, including the Greeks, as genocide.

⁴⁶Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor: And the process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth century*, 4, California: University of California Press, 1971.

⁴⁷ Bilgin Ayata, *The Politics of Displacement: A Transnational Analysis of the Forced Migration of Kurds in Turkey and Europe*, Diss. Johns Hopkins University, 2011.

⁴⁸ See Dawn Chatty's theoretical contributions in this area at

<http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/research/dispossession-forced-migration-middle-east>.

⁴⁹Asef Bayat, 'From "Dangerous Classes" to "Quiet Rebels": Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South,' *International Sociology*, 15.3, 2000, pp. 533-557.

⁵⁰Susanne Soederberg, *The Politics of the New International Financial Architecture: Reimposing Neoliberal Domination in the Global South*, London and New York: Zed Books, 2004.

⁵¹Susan Parnell, and Jennifer Robinson, '(Re)theorizing Cities from the Global South: Looking beyond Neoliberalism,' *Urban Geography*, 33.4, 2012, pp. 593-617.

⁵² Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Post-colonialism Compared: Potentials and Limitations in the Middle East and Central Asia,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34.02, 2002,

pp. 279-297; Jonathan Rigg, *An Everyday Geography of the Global South*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

⁵³Rajeev Patel and Philip McMichael, 'Third Worldism and the Lineages of Global Fascism: the Regrouping of the Global South in the Neoliberal Era,' *Third World Quarterly*, 25.1, 2004, pp. 231-254.

⁵⁴Stephanie JNawyn, Nur Banu Kavakli Birdal and Naomi Glogower, 'Estimating the Extent of Sex Trafficking: Problems in Definition and Methodology,' *International Journal of Sociology*, 43.3, 2013, pp. 55-71.

⁵⁵Hermann Herlinghaus, *Violence without Guilt: Ethical Narratives from the Global South*, New York: Macmillan, 2009.

A Syrian Exodus the Case of Lebanon and Jordan

By

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While the ‘Great Game’ unfolds in Syria, the refugee crisis which has shaken the world has come to be defined in a constricted sense as the Syrians fleeing the civil war and trying to enter Europe. However the ones trying to enter the West are only a small fragment, less than 10 per cent of the millions of refugees for whom Europe remains out of grasp. For instance, Turkey has around 2.5 Syrian refugees inside its borders. The Syrian war has left an estimated four million people outside its borders.¹The contemporary Syrian tragedy has been aptly described by *The Guardian*, ‘It started with thousands of people on the streets. It has resulted in millions of people on the move. Syria's civil war has generated the world's gravest refugee crisis in a generation, with close to 2 million people fleeing the country and perhaps twice that number uprooted and homeless within Syria itself.’² However, the recent media coverage as well as most of the analysis on the subject has centred on the Syrian exodus to Europe and Turkey. Debates and discussions on the subject have also emphasised on the absence of a similar migration to the region itself and the inhospitality of the rich regional states in offering to absorb the refugees within their boundaries. It is true that the current episode in what has been a persisting feature has its focus on Europe due to a number of reasons, primarily the vulnerability of the West Asian region as a whole and its consequent lack of appeal as a destination for the refugee, a consequence of the turmoil in the Arab world in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings of 2011. However, it is important to recognize the constant flow of the Syrian refugees to the neighbouring states, which has reached a saturation point in terms of their physical and financial capacities to absorb the trickling refugee population that has over a period of time amassed into large numbers. Lebanon and Jordan are two such nations, who have been drawn into the web and are coping with the myriad difficulties resulting from the continuous influx of Syrian migrants. Before dwelling on this aspect, the essay provides a

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backdrop to the current context by re-counting the ubiquitous and long-established tradition of migration and displacement in West Asia.

The Legacy of Dislocations in West Asia

Unlike many parts of the world where culturally diverse communities often face a glaring choice between assimilation into dominant cultures or general exclusion, the West Asian region comes across as unique in that it appears to afford a context whereby dissimilar inhabitants can effectively find a place for themselves without either being assimilated or excluded. According to Sami Zubaida it is an approach to “multi-culturalism” or possibly a form of “local cosmopolitanism.”³ Migration has been a part and parcel of human life. Forced migration, which is one aspect of the migration history, is generally large, sudden and violent, precarious, painful and compelling. It is documented in folk tales, religious texts and in oral narratives of people across the world. Forced migration in contemporary West Asia is predominantly linked to the Palestinian people’s dispossession from their lands and homes in the 1947-8 war that signalled the creation of the modern Israeli State. Yet another case, an intriguing one, is that of the Turkish people. Their homeland has been divided across four modern states: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The Fertile Crescent of West Asia, a highly contested stretch of land, has been the focus of centuries, if not millennia, of movements of people. Then, for much of the last five hundred years, the largely involuntary movements of people in West Asia declined as a system of government emerged, which encouraged pluralism and tolerated diversity among peoples under its rule; the drawing out of differences between neighbours and the encouragement of unique identities based on cultural, linguistic or religious grounds prevailed. However, the empire, upon which such identities were based, the Ottoman Empire, came to an end with World War I. Amidst the remains left behind in the grab for land and nation-making out of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires was the inconspicuous groups of people sharing common beliefs about their identities based on ideas of ethnicity and religious variation. In the West Asian heartland of the Ottoman Empire, belonging was based not on a physical birthplace alone, but specifically included the social community of origin. It was rooted in the connections and links between and among a specific group of people as much as, if not more than, in a territory.⁴

Although contemporary West Asia has been the focus of detailed scholarship, much of what has been written about the region in the context of migration studies relates to labour migration. As Castle and Millers observe, migration is a process which affects every dimension of social existence, making research on migration intrinsically interdisciplinary.⁵ According to Richmond, almost all theories of migration focus on the voluntary migration of individuals and in most cases the economic factors are assumed to be foremost dynamic in determining the flow of populations and in interpreting the experience after the migration.⁶ While not many writers articulate an interest in involuntary or politically motivated migrations as they take it for granted that while there might be some consistency in the movement of

economic migrants, the flow of refugees as a result of political crisis or disaster is presumed to be spontaneous and unpredictable. Agamben and other theorists are opposed to this view and regard forced migration embodied in the refugee, asylum seeker, or illegal migrant as the precursor to a universal condition.⁷

According to Alexander Betts, the study of forced migration is premised upon the distinction between forced and voluntary migration.⁸ Forced migration is habitually assumed to have a political basis, being based on flight from persecution or conflict; voluntary migration is generally assumed to be underpinned by economic motives. However, in practice this distinction is problematic, it is not possible to distinguish sharply between volition and coercion, and is likely to be motivated by a mixture of economic and political factors. All migrating individuals face structural constraints and all retain a degree of agency to choose between different options. Nevertheless, even though the forced/voluntary distinction represents a spectrum rather than a clear dichotomy, which is inadequately captured by existing policy categories, it remains an important and useful distinction for analytical purposes. This is the case for two reasons. Firstly, despite the problematic nature of the dichotomy, and the challenge of knowing, 'where to draw the line,' there are certain categories of people whose basic rights their own states are unwilling or unable to provide, and who are therefore compelled to leave their homes. Secondly, because existing policy categories are based on the distinction, the international politics of forced migration is generally distinct from the politics of other aspects of human mobility. Forced migration can be defined as the movement that takes place under significant structural constraints that result from an existential threat. The most high profile and highly researched category of forced migration is refugees. Refugees are defined as people who 'owing to a well-founded fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality or membership of a social group find themselves outside their country of origin and are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country'(Article 1A of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees). During the latter part of the twentieth century, there was an increasing recognition that people could be 'in a refugee-like situation' and be in need of international protection without having crossed an international border. People facing political persecution or fleeing conflict might move to a different part of their own state rather than travel across an international border.⁹

According to Malkki, people are habitually mobile and regularly displaced and create homes and homelands in the absence of territorial national bases...through memories of and claims on, places that they can or will no longer physically/tangibly inhabit.¹⁰ In a region like West Asia, where dispossession and forced migration and diasporic flows have indelibly marked the landscape, the mass movements of people into the region over the past one hundred years, if not millennia, prods one to regard the area as a set of homelands and cultural regions. In the process, the 'here' and 'there' becomes ambiguous in such transnational or diasporic situations and the cultural certainty of the 'centre' becomes as blurred and as unsettled as that of the

periphery. Consequently, the experience of displacement is not confined to those who have moved to the periphery but also affects those in the core.¹¹ The undermining of the links between people and places, which are imagined to be natural, has not led to cultural homogenization.¹² Instead, what has tended to happen with this blurring of places and localities is that ideas of cultural and ethnic distinctions are becoming predominant. The result, as Anderson would have termed it, is an imagined community endeavouring to become attached to imagined places.¹³ Forced migrants and other dispersed persons often look at remembered places as symbolic anchors. Dispossessed people everywhere recall their imagined homelands, which is one of the most powerful unifying symbols for the dispossessed. The Palestinians for example, express a deeply felt relationship to the 'villages of origin' and the 'land' in general. For many of the dispossessed, the imagined homeland acquires a mythical status and image.¹⁴

In West Asia it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the introduction of majorities and minorities created confusion and upset the customary balance which was firmly entrenched in a region that was religiously and ethnically heterogeneous. Some regions, in West Asia in particular, facilitate contradictory notions of the existence of any particular sense of majority culture. In many states of the region such as Syria, the sense of national unity was created through the struggle for independence. Beginning in 1920 with the bestowing of the League of Nations mandate to the French administration, the territory was divided into a number of states but the population of the territory protested and fought against the French policy of 'Divide and Rule.' In 1936 the French reunited the territory administratively into a single state. The exceptions were the expanses that had been attached to Mount Lebanon to create the new state of Greater Lebanon and the *Sanjak* of Alexandretta. After gaining independence in 1946, the Arab Republic of Syria began to build an operative state and assimilate territorially. Its borders did not follow any geophysical boundaries but were shaped by the Great Powers. However, the efforts of the post independent state to create a specific Syrian nation have been perplexing. The notion of an Arab nation, as opposed to a Syrian nation remained resilient and the Arab Cause as opposed to a specific Syrian Cause was what largely bestowed the Syrian regimes with legitimacy. A glimpse at the Syrian constitution reveals an enduring vagueness with regard to the Syrian Arab Republic's place in the Arab homeland and the Arab nation. In Syria, the idea of the nation or state, the adhesive which keeps the modern territory and the people within it together, is perceived as the defender of the Arab Cause. Thus, the numerous minorities, many of them forced migrants from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, constituted disconnected, unassimilated ethnic communities who were not considered as a threat to the state, because by and large, they accepted the state sponsorship and prioritization of the Arab nation and its derivation.¹⁵

In West Asian case, integration without assimilation can be considered as the operational model for state support and continuity. While economic and political integration of previous forced migration communities is prevalent throughout the region social integration was possibly not as well

defined. The latter, however, is not perceived as threatening to the state, nor is there an absence of effort to integrate. Recent settler ethnic communities in the Arab world, people recently dispossessed and resettled, continue to maintain a cultural coherence through their adherence to an imagined homeland and an emphasis on maintaining their language as well as their religion or religious denomination/school. These practices do set such groups apart, but in the contextual background of numerous such groups sharing the same space and thus creating a mosaic of 'Others,' the 'Us' becomes defined by the very diversity of its surroundings. This supports an 'everyday cosmopolitanism' in a sociological sense rather than a normative, philosophical one where individuals and groups are aware of, tolerate, and in some cases, celebrate the 'mix' of 'others' in their daily relations and social networks.¹⁶

The Arab world is not generally defined by the doctrine of ethnic exclusiveness and ethnic nationalism except for what is categorised as 'Arabness'. Thus the image of a singular, closed and primordial group, as defining the state, does not emerge with such clarity. Out of the remains of the former Ottoman Empire and as a result of neo-colonial rule of various lengths in the region, multiple ethnicities have been largely accepted as partners in the contemporary states of the region. As Rosel observes, there is nothing predetermined about ethnic conflict. Majority and minority groups live side by side without the spectre of primordial rights necessarily being raised. There will always be specific thresholds to be crossed before ethnic conflict emerges as inevitable and political embezzlers, ideologues and chieftains, who exploit opportunities for gain at the expense of political failure. Thus, ethnic conflicts are not tragic clashes between primordial groups but the result of bad politics, Lebanon being a case in point.¹⁷

The twentieth century has seen a surge of forced migration, people displaced, uprooted, and forced out of spaces they had occupied for decades if not centuries. The refugee world was somehow strange and unfamiliar and contrary to the natural/national order of things. Forced migrants cut off from their homeland and thus uprooted, were regarded as lacking some of the qualities that made the rest of us human. For some it went as far as assuming a loss of culture also accompanied the loss of the homeland. The refugee came to be objectified, denoting a category of people without homelands, torn loose from their culture (assumed to be grounded in a territory or particular space). The forced migrant or refugee came to be generally regarded as an aberration to the way the world was meant to be organized and hence requiring healing, in the first instance, the carefully laid out and spatially delimited refugee camp. The close link between culture and national identity with territory, which has been so characteristic of European nation-states and which has largely determined the perception of refugees and other dispossessed people in the West, does not translate as easily to the contemporary states comprising the territory once part of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. Here, perhaps because of the large percentage of the population which has experienced both voluntary and involuntary migration in their lifetimes and in those of their parents and grandparents, the

acceptance of mobility as normal rather than an aberration is widespread. Furthermore, the tradition of overlapping heritages and homelands, imagined and rooted, sometimes in the same spaces, has meant greater acceptance of the transferability of culture and national identities, a kind of local cosmopolitanism. Possibly the Ottoman Empire, for all its faults and weaknesses, did leave one valuable heritage for all those who once inhabited its territorial spread: the integration of ethnic or national communities as important groups in the running of the Empire, the recognition that frontiers were often best protected by the creation of buffer communities of one national or ethnic group or another, and the willingness to allow such communities, though often widely dispersed, to be non-assimilated and culturally self-governed.¹⁸

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

Keeping in mind the gravity and scale of the Syrian displacement, *The Forced Migration Review* (September 2014, Issue 47) exclusively focused on the subject. Nigel Fisher in the foreword to the issue summarized the nature and consequences of the Syrian forced migration. He pointed out that as a result of the civil war in Syria vast numbers of Syrians have been displaced from their homes and communities. Fisher elaborated upon the various layers associated with the phenomenon of displacement. Displaced in the real sense of the term implies repeated stories of family separation; the loss of children, parents, friends, homes, entire neighbourhoods; and the terror of raining bombs, of extremist threats, of reprisals against family members imprisoned, tortured, raped, disappeared or killed. Displacement in this case refers to multiple uprootings, to the homes of neighbours or into shells of buildings in their own neighbourhoods, displacement within their own districts and governorates or ultimately fleeing across borders to an unknown future. It is not possible to take into account the trauma that the displaced have suffered and continue to suffer, through recurring flashbacks, through current rejection or continued family separation. Syria's civil war is characterized by the absence of proportionality and distinction. Across Syria's borders, the neighbouring countries are struggling to respond to the requirements of the innumerable refugees that they host today; Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey primarily but also Egypt and even Iraq have been liberal beyond reasonable expectations. Yet after four years, they are feeling the pressure; increasing social tensions in host communities, the competition between citizens and Syrian refugees for health care, shelter, water, jobs and places in school. Thus, as Fisher puts it, these challenges demand a focus beyond refugees alone, to assess and respond to the strains on communities and on national treasuries. As the civil war drags on, considering the increasing regional instability, it is estimated that the numbers of internally displaced people will surge along with the number of refugees.¹⁹

According to Zetter and Ruaudel, in a region already hosting millions of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, the scale of the Syrian crisis is putting immense additional pressure on the resources and capacities of the

neighboring countries. With no prospects of the civil war waning in Syria in the near future and with a peace process that might actually encourage the return of refugees, the displacement is becoming protracted. Livelihood sustainability, cost of living and rent levels, alongside food insecurity and increasing indebtedness, are major concerns for the refugees as well as for their hosts. Syrian refugees find casual, irregular and predominantly unskilled work when they can; across Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq about 30% of the working refugee population are in some form of paid, sporadic employment but, with high competition for work, wage levels are declining. That the majority of refugees live in urban areas is a significant factor since they are more able to engage in economic activity than the refugees who are in camps. However, the opportunities are extremely limited and the livelihood susceptibility of the urban refugees is no less severe than those of camps. The Syrian refugees have no legal entitlement to work in Jordan and Lebanon without a work permit as such it is the informal sector which provides the opportunities for income generation but wages are unsurprisingly very low and working conditions are unfair. The Syrian refugees employ various strategies for sheer survival such as the sale of personal assets, which not only worsens their existing poverty but also diminishes the resources that the refugees might have with them when and if they return to Syria to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. The absence of employment has also excessively affected women and youth; it has led to an increase in child labour, which also entails loss of education that will affect their life chances both in exile and when they return to Syria. The general depiction, then, is one of chronic helplessness which is both expanding and becoming more deep-rooted. Even as, unavoidably, the human focus is on Syrian refugees, the situation of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees secondarily displaced from Syria is particularly grim. The cost and impacts of displacement on their livelihoods are severe and their marginalization from the mainstream response programme is especially perturbing.²⁰

Zetter and Ruauadel further point out that in the micro-economic sense, house rents are rising steeply, edging the local population out of the market. Significant spurts in unemployment, miserable wage rates and restricted employment opportunities, essentially for low skilled labour, are prevalent. Despite the formal restrictions on working, some refugees gain employment and the resultant surge in labour supply has deeply affected labour markets, increasing the market prices for basic commodities. While cash transfers to aid refugees have boosted their purchasing power it causes prices to rise in local markets, intensifying the livelihood susceptibility of a progressively large number of local households. The fiscal stress has affected economic production and output and is also severely upsetting the host populations, impoverishing a very significant number of (mainly low-income and already poor) households. The crisis also had a very detrimental impact on all the public services, notably the health and education sectors, as well as services such as water supply and power. The refugee influx has also led to severe disruption in regional trading upsetting the import and export performance and affecting commodity prices for consumers. The political

instability and insecurity has reduced investor and consumer confidence. On the other hand, development opportunities and positive effects have also been reported in the region such as increased availability of cheap labour, rising demand and consumption by refugees, and benefits for large-scale agricultural producers, landlords, local traders, businesses and retailers, construction contractors, as well as suppliers of goods and commodities to the humanitarian programme. In some areas, educated refugee professionals such as engineers, doctors and skilled construction and craft workers have increased the local economic capacity.²¹

Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan: An Overview

Lebanon has 1, 172,753 (UNHCR, September 2015) Syrian refugees, that is one in every five person, Jordan has 629,245 (UNHCR, September 2015) Syrian refugees, that is one in every thirteen person. As a majority of the Syrian refugees live in Lebanon and Jordan, two of the smallest states of the region, weak infrastructure and limited resources are nearing a breaking point under the strain. The entry of Syrian refugees into Lebanon and Jordan has caused unprecedented social and economic challenges to both countries. The impact of their presence is felt on a day to day basis by the Lebanese and Jordanians citizens whether through higher rents and declining public service availability, or through health and education infrastructure that is stretched beyond its limits. Both the countries have been generous to refugees, particularly at the societal level. However, the tension between host communities and refugees within Lebanese society are palpable, and in both countries government and societal discourse about refugees has increasingly become tangibly resentful. Omar Dahi observes that the crisis has put a colossal strain on the fiscal capacity of both countries consequently commending more state spending may appear to be counter-productive. 'However, development spending is justified for several reasons. First, the economies of Lebanon and Jordan were suffering from economic problems beforehand. Second, economic spending will benefit these countries' citizens as well as the Syrian refugees; not spending for fear that it will provide refugees with an incentive to remain will hurt the country's citizens just as much as it hurts refugees. Third, the fact that most of the refugees in both countries are not in camps has created particularly challenging problems as reaching the refugees and serving their needs is even more expensive than it would otherwise be. It also means that across the board development spending is the most efficient way to address the humanitarian crisis.'²²

In both Jordan and Lebanon economic challenges preceded the refugee crisis. The situation in Lebanon is characterized by sharper economic and regional inequalities, supplemented by deep social cleavages and sectarian fault lines that have been aggravated by the Syrian conflict. However, both Jordan and Lebanon are unwilling to embark on major development spending. There is apprehension that significant investment in refugees will encourage further inflows, or integration of existing refugees. This line of thinking has been criticized. 'First, neglecting this issue hurts the domestic population as

much as the refugee population. Second, the decision or ability to return home for many Syrians will depend on a number of other issues too. Syrians who come from areas where there is no possibility for economic life or where they are too fearful for their lives will prefer to stay, even if it means living in destitution. Third, ignoring the issue will cause more problems than if attempts were made to tackle them head on. The host countries have an incentive to provide refugees with a decent living so as to avoid the social problems that will arise from extreme poverty and destitution. Finally, all the neighboring countries will benefit from a future Syria that is strong socially and economically. Hence capacity building is an investment in the long term regional economy.²³ As far as Lebanon is concerned, in addition to the fears of integration there is also the genuine problem of a 'weak state' as such foreign aid could give the government the ability to strengthen its capacity.

Lebanon

A UNHCR country profile of Lebanon, encapsulates the situation in the country in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis:

- The impact of the Syrian crisis - including on the economy, demographics, political instability, and security - continues to deepen across Lebanon. With more than 1.3 million refugees expected by the beginning of 2015, Lebanon's exceptional hospitality will be extremely stretched.
- The Government has established an inter-ministerial crisis cell, confirming its pro-active engagement in refugee issues. While the country is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and despite restrictions imposed at the border, it is expected that Syrians in need of immediate protection and assistance will continue to find safe haven in Lebanon.
- Refugees have access to most basic services through public institutions, where the authorities continue to play an active role in facilitating response coordination and planning.
- Syrian refugees, like the Lebanese in local communities most affected by the influx, are becoming increasingly vulnerable, despite the large-scale inter-agency response to date. Humanitarian needs show little signs of abating. As their displacement extends and their savings deplete, refugees' socio-economic vulnerability increases.
- An effective display of international solidarity and support is vital for Lebanon, which has received the highest number of Syrian refugees in the world. Failing this, the country's capacity to respond and withstand the Syria crisis will be severely tested.²⁴

Dalia Aranki and Olivia Kalis observe that according to Lebanese law, without formal papers recognizing their entry or stay in Lebanon, refugees from Syria are considered to be there 'illegally,' giving them only limited legal status in the country. As a consequence, they feel compelled to restrict their movements for fear of being arrested, detained or even deported back to Syria. For refugees with limited legal status, their ability to access basic services, work and UNHCR registration sites and to register births and marriages is severely restricted. The situation for the Palestinian refugees from Syria is even more challenging, as the restrictions on entering Lebanon and on

renewing their legal stay are considerably more stringent. Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, henceforth there is inadequate protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon, and even though it is bound by the customary principle of *non-refoulement*²⁵ and by the obligations of the human rights treaties which it has signed and which are incorporated into its Constitution. Although UNHCR has been permitted by the Lebanese government to register refugees, the protection offered by such registration remains limited, this leaves refugees in a challenging situation. In order to address the challenges that refugees with legal status face, they often adopt coping mechanisms which can lead to exposure to new risks. Some of the main ones are: returning to Syria in order to try to re-enter through an official border crossing and thereby get another entry coupon free of charge; paying high prices for retrieving identity documentation from Syria; buying fake documentation; or using other people's documents. Due to limited funds and the high cost of visas, many families prioritize the renewal of the residency visa for the main income-earner in the family, usually a male member of the household. This often leaves the other members of the family without legal stay documentation. As men, who in certain geographic areas of Lebanon are more likely to be arrested, decrease their movements, women seem to increase theirs. Some women with limited legal status reported that their husbands prefer to send them to receive assistance because they themselves are afraid of being arrested at checkpoints, particularly in North Lebanon. While this is done so that the family can access assistance, it exposes women to risks of sexual harassment and exploitation. Adults with limited legal status often send their children to work instead of them, since children are less likely to be arrested. As a consequence, the children cannot attend school and are more likely to be exposed to abuse and exploitation.²⁶

Helen Mackreath observes that two problems have plagued the reaction to the situation of Lebanese host communities with regard to the Syrian refugee presence. The first is the tension over short-term versus long-term strategies towards the displacement, with the former being emergency responses largely excluding the host community and the latter being 'developmental' approaches which include them as 'vulnerable' populations. The second is the differences in perception and approach between actors, particularly governmental and non-governmental actors, as to whether host community actors should be taken seriously as an empowered channel of assistance or should be viewed as vulnerable. Host communities play a significant role in assisting Syrian refugees as a result of the decision of the Lebanese government not to set up camps. The assistance takes many different forms. The bulk of the assistance being afforded to Syrian refugees by the Lebanese host community has come about through informal, personal exchanges and one-to-one interactions. Undeniably, there are also individuals who take advantage of the situation by exploiting the vulnerability of the refugees, through charging high rents or paying low wages. Alongside, this there is a micro-economy forming on highly localized scales; these small-scale bargains between refugees and their hosts are useful for both populations and highlight both the importance of dignified 'autonomous' trade for the refugee,

and the significance of the role of the host community in providing assistance by accepting the refugees into the informal economic life of the community. The Lebanese individuals who are hosting Syrian families do not necessarily expect anything in return for the support they are giving. However, there is a form of gift economy occurring, with many Lebanese individuals who offer assistance expecting to be repaid by the Syrians at some point in the future and there is a mutual understanding that this will occur. A large number of networks of assistance are being formed between women they are more likely to rent out an outbuilding or basement of their home where they can. These Lebanese hosts who open up their homes to refugees are essentially operating outside of much of the assistance being given to refugees by NGOs.²⁷

Frances Topham Smallwood has written about the emergence of a cadre of educated middle class Syrian refugees dedicated to improving conditions for Syrians at home and in Lebanon. They are forming a civil society in exile but face obstacles to consolidating their presence and becoming more effective. 'You can do a lot for Syria from outside,' says one of the refugees' activists in Beirut. Some were involved in a range of initiatives to support fellow Syrians at home and in Lebanon, collecting and distributing food and non-food items through networks of private individual benefactors and volunteers, improving conditions in tented settlements or helping Syrian families to pay their rent. Others focus their energies on cultural and educational activities, such as providing art and music classes for refugee children or filming a documentary on the lives of the Syrian intelligentsia in Lebanon. Several were working on projects that they hoped could sow the seeds of a flourishing democratic civil society in Syria, holding workshops on active citizenship and negotiation. These Syrian led initiatives are hampered by several factors. They are not permitted to register officially as NGOs or to open bank account, which hampers their ability to secure funding. Political sensitivities also constrain refugees' activities as the Lebanese state, with its official policy of disassociation from events in Syria.²⁸ Catherine Thoricifsson observes that three years into the conflict, displaced Syrians in Lebanon are affected by the indifference of both the government as well as the ordinary people towards their presence. The absence of official camps in Lebanon makes it far more difficult to ensure refugee protection and coordinate aid relief. The refugees themselves, however, say they prefer living outside camps where they have better opportunities to manipulate their situation. While local practices of hospitality toward the Syrian refugees are widespread, the Syrians have been used as scapegoats for economic as well as political insecurity. An overwhelming majority of Lebanese consider the Syrians as responsible for taking jobs away from the Lebanese and lowering wages.²⁹

Jordan

Similarly, A UNHCR country profile of Jordan summarizes the situation in the country as a result of the Syrian crisis:

- The operational environment in Jordan continues to be considerably affected by the security situation in the neighbouring Syrian Arab Republic

(Syria) and the influx of Syrians into the country, as well as by developments in Iraq and Gaza in 2014.

- Jordan provides asylum for a large number of refugees, including from Syria and Iraq. It has granted Syrian refugees access to services, such as health and education, in host communities. The Syrian refugee camps of Azraq and Zaatari were built on land provided by the authorities where they also ensure security.
- Jordan continues to demonstrate hospitality, despite the substantial strain on national systems and infrastructure. In 2014, the Government published the National Resilience Plan 2014-2016, presenting "proposed priority responses to mitigate the impact of the Syrian crisis on Jordan and Jordanian host communities." The authorities' active engagement will likely influence the UNHCR-coordinated inter-agency refugee response.
- Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Nonetheless, the Government refers to Syrians as refugees, and the protection space is generally favorable, although fragile owing to the country's own socio-economic challenges.
- The 1998 memorandum of understanding (MoU) between UNHCR and the Government, partially amended in 2014, forms the basis for the Office's activities in Jordan. In the absence of any international or national legal refugee instruments in force in the country, the MoU establishes the parameters for cooperation between UNHCR and the Government.³⁰

Saleh Al-Kilani has emphasized upon the significance that Jordan should protect its national identity and maintain its cultural obligations at the same time it has to face up to its humanitarian obligations. More than 40 per cent of Jordan's population originates from other countries, including two million Palestinians, around 1.3 million Syrians and 29,000 Iraqis. In order to protect its national identity in these circumstances and because of the convoluted state of affairs in the region generally, the country has not become a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Jordan's law on refugees is defined by a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR, amended in April 2014. It includes the Convention's definition of 'refugee' and accepts the principle of *non-refoulement* and third country resettlement for refugees. However, it does not consider local integration as a way out. Article 21 of the Constitution offers refugee status for political asylum but only in very exceptional circumstances and it is not an option available for most refugees. Everyone crossing the border from Syria is regarded as a refugee unless they are perceived as a potential security threat or are suspected to have crossed illegally. Kilani elaborates on the entire process of screening at the check points. At the crossing points there are temporary assembly or collection sites where categorization and prioritization takes place. Priority is given first to the injured and ailing; then to children, particularly unaccompanied or separated minors; next to the elderly; and lastly to the general adult population. The vast majority of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees fleeing the conflict are living outside the camps, thus putting an extra burden on the local and host communities. Thus, Jordan is faced with the challenge of balancing human rights and national security in the economic, political and social fields.³¹

Jordan took the stand of not to send anyone back to Syria once they are in the country, however there are Syrians who have returned, some as traders, some to fight, and some say they would rather die in Syria than live in a camp. The high cost of living has been one of the causes and the snow over the winter was a factor for many of them and there were others who trusted the Syrian government when it stated that it controls 70 per cent of the country and thus took the decision to return. While Jordan supports resettlement the government refuses to publicize the issue as it apprehends it will encourage Syrians to come to Jordan as a 'gateway' to third countries. The inadequate numbers of resettlement slots available make resettlement inadequate as a real solution. Stabilizing Syria is considered to be the best solution. Jordan is looked upon as playing an important role in controlling the region and keeping it safe. It is playing an important role to contain the effects of the conflict and, by extension, protecting the economic interests of many Western nations. Thus regardless of the fact that Jordan is not a party to the 1951 Convention, the history of refugees and migrants in Jordan and the practice and the experience of the country divulge respect for human dignity and humanitarianism as much as or more than many countries who are party to the Convention. As Kilani appropriately puts it, the most important obstacle to the protection of migrants' and refugees' rights is not due to the nonexistence of law but the inability of states to respect the conventions, agreements and declarations that they have unreservedly acknowledged.³²

Conclusions

The Syrian civil war is assuming a whole new dimension with new intriguing alliances in the making and old and new players staking their claims in the new 'Great Game.' The direct consequence and real tragedy in human terms of this anarchic situation is the colossal forced displacement of the Syrian population. The recent splurge of Syrian migrants to Europe and the various catastrophic aspects associated with the passage has grabbed global headlines of mass outcry and empathy but the gravity of the situation is no less in the bordering nations of Syria, typified by its two small neighbours, Lebanon and Jordan. While the Syrian refugees have a closet full of horror stories to narrate both the host countries already beset with their own set of internal complications which they have to contend with are now faced with a sizeable number of outsiders to deal with. There is always a sunny side to having stateless, helpless, impoverished people in the midst as they are willing to do the undoable and unthinkable for very little in return but there is the flip side to it as well. As the state infrastructure crumbles and social tensions arise within the host nations, another uncertain chapter is inaugurated in an already deeply contested and uncertain geopolitical space. The story of displacement in the West Asian expanse continues unabated...

Notes

- ¹Sreenivasan Jain, 'Children of Kobane: Escaped from ISIS into "Slavery,"' *NDTV*, September 29, 2015.
- ²*The Guardian*, See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/series/syria-refugee-crisis>.
- ³Sami Zubaida, 'Cosmopolitanism in the Middle East,' in R. Meijer (Ed) *Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Authenticity in the Middle East*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999; Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.2.
- ⁴Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, pp.8-9.
- ⁵Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- ⁶Anthony Richmond, 'Refugee Migration: Sociological perspectives on Refugee Movements,' *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 6.1, 1993, pp.7-24.
- ⁷Giorgio Agamben, *We Refugees* (translated by M. Roche) 1994; <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/agamben-we-refugees.html>.
- ⁸Alexander Betts, *Forced Migration and Global Politics*, Chichester: Wiley &Blackwell, 2009, p.4.
- ⁹*Study Guide: The Rights of Refugees*, University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library, See: <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/edumat/studyguides/refugees.htm>.
- ¹⁰Lisa Malkki, 'National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees,' *Cultural Anthropology*, 7.1, Feb 1992, pp. 24-44, p.24.
- ¹¹Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 66.
- ¹²James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
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- ¹⁴Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, p.25.
- ¹⁵*Ibid*, p.31.
- ¹⁶Asef Bayat, 'Everyday Cosmopolitanism,' in *ISIM Review*, Autumn 2008, p.5; Sami Zubaida, 'Cosmopolitanism in the Middle East'.
- ¹⁷J. Rosel, 'Nationalism and Ethnicity: Ethnic Nationalism and the Regulation of Ethnic Conflict', David Turton (Ed), *War and Ethnicity: Global Connections and Local Violence*. San Marino: Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Social Stress, 1997.
- ¹⁸Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, pp.36-37.
- ¹⁹Nigel Fischer, 'Foreword: The Inheritance of Loss,' in *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, pp 4-5.
- ²⁰Roger Zetter and Heloise Ruaudel, 'Development and Protection Challenges of the Syrian Refugee Crisis,' *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, pp. 6-10, pp 6-7.
- ²¹*Ibid*, pp. 7-8.
- ²²Omar Dahi, 'The Refugee Crisis in Lebanon and Jordan: The Need for Economic Development Spending', *Forced Migration Review*, 47, September 2014, pp. 11-13, p.11.
- ²³Omar Dahi, *ibid*, pp. 12-13.
- ²⁴2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile: Lebanon, see <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486676.html>
- ²⁵Refoulement means the expulsion of persons who have the right to be recognised as refugees. The principle of non-refoulement has first been laid out in 1954 in the UN-Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which, in Article 33(1) provides that: 'No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner

whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.’

²⁶ Dalia Aranki and Olivia Kalis, ‘Limited Legal Status for Refugees from Syria in Lebanon,’ *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, pp.17-18.

²⁷ Helen Mackreath, ‘The Role of Host Communities in North Lebanon,’ *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, pp. 19-20.

²⁸ Frances Topham Smallwood, ‘Refugee Activists’ Involvement in Relief Effort in Lebanon,’ *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, p.21.

²⁹ Catherine Thorieifsson, ‘Coping Strategies among Self-settled Syrians in Lebanon,’ *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, p.23.

³⁰ 2015 UNHCR Country Operations Profile: Jordan, see <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486566.html>.

³¹ Saleh al-Kilani, ‘A Duty and a Burden on Jordan,’ *Forced Migration Review, The Syria Crisis, Displacement and Protection*, 47, September 2014, pp. 30-31.

³² Saleh al-Kilani, *ibid*, p.31.

‘Putting the Local Back in Uyghur History’

The Uyghur and Dungan Migrants of Central Asia

By

Suchandana Chatterjee *

Debates about migration as a force that have pushed out some ethnic groups and drawn others back home have continued for some time. In the case of Eurasia’s nationalities, there have been reappraisals about ‘re--opening’ of areas to newcomers. A gamut of migrant motivations to and from Mongolia, Russia and Central Asia is the focus of the new literature that have emerged from a diverse range of disciplines discussing diverse patterns of migration and notions of home and belonging in the post-Soviet period. Usually, discussions tend to converge on complexities of contemporary human migration that are challenging to the nation states. What is not often considered is how, across generations, the migrants have *learned* to share historical experiences of belonging. This study aims to study aspect of migration as an attractive force, especially in the case of the Uyghurs and Dungans who have migrated from China since the Qing era (1780s).

The purpose therefore is to understand the dynamics of ‘putting the local back into Uyghur history’.¹ The attempt is to situate Uyghurs and also the Dungans not *within* historical time frames or geographical spaces, but bringing in aspects of interconnectedness across shared spaces as a subject of analysis. Today’s indigenous Uyghur histories of Xinjiang are seen as ‘local’ from the Chinese perspective, which considers the Uyghurs and the province of Xinjiang to be part of the Chinese state. From the Uyghur nationalist perspective, the same history is national, rather than local. This essay seeks to demonstrate the importance of understanding the non-Western and non-Chinese roots of today’s Uyghur historical writing, a tradition strongly influenced by local history. Migration may also be perceived as a process of cultural interaction. This and other aspects of global flows like tourism, mass media, music, trade, travel and pilgrimage constitute the new domain of Uyghur studies.² An alternative body of knowledge, belief and practice emanating from Central Asia has shaped Uyghur identity—which needs to be seriously considered.³

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The issue therefore, is, the need to look beyond the common perception of the Uyghurs as a minority nationality inhabiting the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. Generally speaking, scholarship about the Uyghurs in China is factored on the binary relationship between the majority Han population and its minority nationalities like the Hui and the Uyghurs.⁴ Such a perception is factored on the Chinese penetration in the western borderlands. The Uyghurs, in a sinologist's view, have a territorial focus—i.e. Xinjiang or New Dominions/Eastern Turkestan. At the same time, there have been contested notions of Uyghur history centering on the western prefectures of Xinjiang bordering Kazakhstan that played a crucial role in changing the character of Uyghur historical writing since the 1940s.⁵ Over time, the Soviet ideological component was replaced by ideas of a homeland that defined 'Uyghur commonality'.

Transformation of Uyghur Studies

In the early Soviet period, the noted Turcologist, A.N. Bernshtam emphasised on the Uyghurs' and Central Asians' common descent. His view that the Uyghurs were indigenous communities not only of Eastern Turkestan but also of the Semirech'e region in the 8th-9th centuries articulated the Soviet notion of statehood encompassing a wide range of nationalities. During the formation of the pro-Soviet East Turkestan Republic (ETR) in the prefectures of Ili, Tarbaghatay and Altay, links between the Uyghurs and the Semirech'e region were popularized largely through his writings. Bernshtam's works faded into memory at the time of the Communist takeover of China in 1949.

The Soviet concept of statehood was applied to research on medieval Uyghur kingdoms of Turpan and the Qarakhanid khanates and the short-lived independent states of Yatta Shahr (Altishahr) in southern Xinjiang (or the Kashgar Emirate) within the domain of Turcology. In Almaty, at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Uyghur Studies was introduced by a skeletal research group which transformed in the 1960s into a more vibrant study circle since the exodus of the Uyghurs, Dungans and Kazakhs from the Kulja region. Soon, Dungan Studies were incorporated into the school of Uyghur Studies which got institutional recognition within the Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan in 1986. However, unlike the Uyghurs, the Dungans' Chineseness is often viewed with scepticism—i.e. 'as Chinese, but not quite'—and their ancestors, e.g. the Huis are considered to be 'familiar strangers'.⁶ But it is interesting to note varying perceptions about the origin of the Dungans—besides the Chinese and Russian, there is an interesting variant discussing Turkic descent of the Dungans. Sometimes the blanket word Dungan refers to people of Hui ethnicity, i.e. the Uyghurs, the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz who settled down and lived in the Xinjiang region since the 1760's. The Dungans of Central Asia (and Kazakhstan) call themselves *Huizhu*.⁷

Such reappraisals also raise questions about ethnicity as a marker of identity in the case of the descendants of Dungan Chinese migrants and its change and preservation in the context of the fragile social fabric of the

Central Asian states. These Chinese-speaking Dungans mostly staying in compact communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are descendants of migrant groups coming from China's provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu. These migrants moved across the border into the territory of Tsarist Russia in the latter part of the nineteenth century after the defeat of the northwest uprising by the Qing army. After arriving in Russian Central Asia, these early landless Chinese migrants were allowed by the Tsarist government to reclaim wasteland for farming and engage in animal husbandry. These Chinese migrants and their descendants also actively participated in Soviet reconstruction efforts during the Second World War.

The Dungans' exclusive identity has emerged partly due to the geographical isolation brought due to the challenging mountain barrier, the T'ien Shan or 'Heavenly Mountains' and partly due to the ambiguous sentiments towards the ancestral homeland of Zhongyuan given the collective memory of the tragic exodus (the earlier generations of these Chinese migrants in Central Asia used to call themselves *tsunjanziñ*, i.e. 'people of/from Chungyüan' – 'Chungyüan' or 'Chungt'u', literally meaning 'Middle Land' or 'Middle Earth', being a common Chinese expression in the old days referring to China). However, the Chinese language in the form of a mixture of the Shaanxi and Gansu regional dialects remarkably written today not in Chinese characters but in the Cyrillic alphabet, and Chinese traditions of the Shaanxi and Gansu varieties have been preserved across generations until today.

All these assessments indicate intricate layers in Uyghur identity.⁸ Ablet Kamalov, a Uyghur historian based in Almaty, the issue of Uyghur autonomy became a sensitive issue among Communist ideologues in Kazakhstan. With the repression of ETR and establishment of PRC in 1949, the subject of autonomy became an open-ended affair: with a vast spectrum of ideas about Turkic commonality, shared lineages among the Uyghurs of China and Central Asia and so on. Nonetheless, the possibility of Uyghur autonomy was discussed within the domain of Uyghur Studies in Kazakhstan for example, and conscious efforts were made by Soviet authorities to lay foundations for core studies about indigenous and autonomous Uyghur units especially in the Semirechie. Studies about Uyghur epigraphic monuments in Semirechie became very popular. The idea of Uyghurs as indigenous to Semirechie became one of the core elements of the research done then and also bred ideas about Uyghur nationalism in the contemporary period. It is almost fairly established that *coping* with the past and present of Uyghur nationalism became a subject of interest. Uyghur migration into Russian territory since 1871 in the aftermath of Qing occupation, Muslim rebellion and Russian occupation of Ili valley have always been recognized as an important ingredient in various versions of people's history of Kazakhstan. Uyghurs as immigrant settlers in Kazakhstan who were driven out of the Dzhungar khanate and not having the right of autonomy in Kazakhstan was maintained throughout the Soviet period. Malik Kabirov's thesis of 1987 represented the first departure from previous hypotheses, as it considered them as autochthons of Semirechie. Such Uyghur sentiments of Kabirov were completely at odds with scholarly approaches in Moscow and Leningrad that

traced Uyghur immigration to the region as far back as the 8th century. Central to that argument was the migration of Turkic tribes after the collapse of the Uyghur Kaganate in 840 AD---and traces of Turkic settlements in the Semirechie region. The Turkic lineage is considered to be a part of ‘ancient Uyghur history’. Among Kazakh intellectuals in the Soviet Union, Uyghur presence in Semirechie was traced back to the old Uyghur Kaganate---an ancient or medieval Uyghur history. A Soviet Uyghur culture became a celebrated topic. It is only in the post-Soviet period that dark phases in Uyghur history like mass killings of Uyghurs in Semirechie by Muravev in 1918 or Soviet repression of Uyghur intellectuals and Soviet role in the repression of ETR have come to light.

At the other end of the spectrum in post-Soviet Uyghur studies is a genre of literature that appreciates shared histories of the Uyghurs of Kazakhstan and China.⁹ The Uyghur community’s spatial identity, according to common knowledge, is Eastern Turkestan, a term used interchangeably with ‘Chinese Turkestan’ and ‘Sinkiang’ from where large number of internal migrations occurred during the Qing period (1644-1912). The Ili district of China was reconstituted as the province of Xinjiang in 1884 after it was returned to the Qing Empire. The transfer of power by the Treaty of St Petersburg was followed by a mass movement of Uyghurs westward towards Semirech’e. The Uyghur migrants were settled in several *qishlaqs* (villages) in the Russian portion of the Ili valley (i.e. Semirechie) in Yarkand while six *volosts* or administrative districts were established for the Uyghur migrants in Yarkand, Aksu, Charyn, Koram and Qara Su and four settlements in Verny. From this time onwards, the Uyghurs have been constituted as one of the three main ethnic groups in the Russian portion of the Ili valley along with the Russians and the Kazakhs. A smaller group of immigrants from southern part of Xinjiang, called *Kashgarliks*, proceeded in the direction of the Ferghana Valley. By the end of the 19th century, a small group of Uyghurs also moved towards the direction of Bairam Ali. After the Russian revolution of 1917, a large number of Uyghurs moved eastwards towards China to escape Soviet repression. This back and forth movement of the Uyghurs dating back to the Tsarist Russia’s settlement policy establishes the Uyghurs’ rootedness in the Semirech’e.

There seem to be linguistic connections between the Uyghurs and the Altai branch of the Turkic language family which also creates a commonality of issues between the Uyghurs and the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Uzbeks of Central Asia. This common home was originally situated in the Orkhon valley in eastern Siberia and Mongolia and thereafter included parts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Xinjiang. The centre of this early Uyghur state was in Beshbalyk, not Kashgar. These facts substantiate evidence about the Uyghurs as indigenous settlers in the Semirechie region. Such subjects became popular in Soviet historiography during the 1950’s-1970’s. Since the late 1980’s, the issue of rootedness of the Uyghurs in Semirechie was revived.¹⁰

Local Dynamics

In the revivalist literature, the internal dynamics of early Uyghur states of Eastern Turkestan became the principal focus. One such spatial unit that comprised of the oases settlements of the Altishahr (Six Cities south of the Tian Shan Mountains) actually defined the spatial category ‘Eastern Turkestan’. In this revivalist literature, Yatta Shahr Uyghur State (*Uygurskoje Gosudarstvo Yettishahr*) has come up for discussion. Rian Thum, in his research about sacred routes of Uyghur history, has indicated that Uyghur history proceeds from the region known among many Uyghurs as Altishahr. Yet, this name is not found in modern maps as in Chinese official discourse, the region is *Xinjiang* (pronounced/transliterated as *Shinjang*) though in everyday speech the name *Altishahr* persists.

The tension over geographic names is not the simple by-product of a binary ‘us-them’ relationship. Rather, there were much more powerful and dynamic actors in Altishahr’s history. The intratribal and intertribal power struggle between Manchus and Dzhungar Mongols had resulted in Altishahr’s transformation into a Chinese domain. The region constituted a part of the Great Qing Empire in 1759 and the ruler, the Qianlong Emperor as master, extended his control over Manchuria, Mongolia, China and Tibet. From his power centre, the Emperor attacked the Dzhungars by sending his Manchu and Mongol soldiers on their hot pursuit towards the steppe region in the western borders of his empire. Even though the Dzhungar armies were pushed back, there were traces of Dzhungar inheritance within the Manchu domain—upto the agricultural oases that surround the Taklamakan Desert to the south, namely, Altishahr where the final battle between the Manchu rulers and Dzhungar descendants took place. In the final result, Altishahr, the steppe homeland of the Dzhungars, became a Chinese administrative unit with the name of Xinjiang (New Dominion). Till 1932, the region was barely known for some mild Altishahri rebellions and moments of independence (1933-34). So, the memory of the region was that of a dependency under (a) Qianlong imperial rule and (b) People’s Republic of China (PRC). The re-imagination of Altishahr’s history followed in the PRC regime, and the region became a geographically hybrid steppe belt combined with oases-ringed deserts. In the monolithic history of Republican China, the previous narrative of Altishahr and its identity were completely lost.

Now, like Thum, there is a growing awareness among scholars about Altishahri opinions among the Uyghurs. In an attempt to establish the group identity of southern Xinjiang’s settled Turkic inhabitants, a handful of scholars have argued that such kind of place identity prevailed much before the construction of a Uyghur identity. In the absence of a national history, separate histories were linked together through say, shrine pilgrimage and also manuscript tradition, yielding a broad-based historical tradition that was articulated through regional narratives. What we see here therefore, is a regional identity that expressed itself in a non-modern context. The Uyghurs too, have identified their Turkic places of belonging—e.g. Qumul not Hami, Ghulja/Kulja not Yining and so on. Since the term *Altishahr* denotes six cities,

it is the setting of these cities that constitute the real local dynamic. The Turkic-speaking, settled Muslim population are considered local/indigenous (*yerliklar*). By being Altishahri one would mean a Uyghur culture with Uyghur historical tradition and practices (*tazkeirah* as the primary vehicle of local history, textual representations about local heroes, respect for local saints and manuscript technology that defined Altishahr's past, pilgrimages and pilgrim routes with pilgrims crisscrossing the entire Altishahri space) and with a network of local historical narratives that also connected people as an imagined community, as Benedict Anderson would have us believe. There were transregional connections—like Altishahri pilgrims making the journey for the *hajj* to Mecca; businessmen and caravan traders travelling to Kashmir and Ferghana, the Altishahri farmers settling in Yili valley, Kokand khans having Altishahri wives as they established permanent residences in Kashgar after coming down from Ferghana and so on. So, what is defined by Altishahri historical tradition is a combination of various historical and cultural genres—Persian, Arabic and Turkic. The argument here is in for an Altishahri constellation, rather than what Justin Rudelson argued earlier about local oases identities creating fissures in the overall Uyghur fabric. Rian Thum draws our attention to the strains created by the discourse about nationalism and resistance and takes us to Altishahr's cosmopolitan domain of a mosaic of pilgrims' tales, shrines and historical traditions. Such is the case of Bash Torgaq, an oasis near Khotan where the shrine of the 10th century Persian dying hero, Siyavush, exists. Pilgrims go to the place and visit his grave, offering their prayers and leaving their cloth ribbons on the trees. The Siyavush tale was neatly integrated into Altishahr's literary epic tradition. This was a clear case of the ways in which histories were inherited and embraced in Altishahr.¹¹ Such opinions reflect one aspect: i.e. the relationship of the people with the land.

Another aspect of this Turkic belonging is related to Semirech'e (Kazakh name *Zhetysu* or the Land of the Seven Rivers) from where the Uyghur community migrated to southeast Kazakhstan in the 1880s. What stands out is the twist in Uyghur Studies: a reappraisal of the Uyghurs as social and cultural actors in the Central Asian space: very much distinct from what analysts have argued about the Uyghurs as a transnational security threat.¹² Such nostalgia for places like Semirechie became the subject matter in the Kazakh film *Zamanai* (1998). In the film, the journey of a grandmother and her grandson (*Amanai*) to their ancestral land in Kazakhstan (Semirechié) and the conversation between her and her dead son *Zamanai* is the scene of action. The conversation till the end of the journey depicts the contested notions of the Kazakh homeland. The mother-son imaginary conversation reveals the mother's longing of being united with her tribal home in Semirechie while the son is still loyal to the Soviet military service in which he was trained and which cost him his life. It reflects the nostalgia among the Kazakhs for Semireché which was their ancestral homeland, the tension between Kazakhs of Kazakhstan and the migrants from China and the attachment for the new home in China.

Grandmother to Alima (mother of Amanai):

I will show Amanai his father's land.
That is what Zamanai would love.
My grandson, Amanai stays with me.
He will see the birthplace of his ancestors.

Alima:

Grandmother---do as you please.
You can stay.
Amanai is not staying.
You keep saying "home country" but where is it?
Neither you nor me have it.
One's home is a place where one feels good. ¹³

Narratives of Exodus

There is a tragic variant of the migrant story—the 'influx' of the *xinyimin* from China since the early 1990s has triggered xenophobic response with varying intensity in many of the Central Asian societies, especially in the case of descendants of early Chinese migrants who are now facing a whole new set of challenges because of the proclamation of nationalist agendas by the titular and dominant ethnic groups and the difficulties faced by the entire region following the collapse of the Soviet command economy. Their encounters with living in a host country reflect negative aspects of migration. These are harsh encounters and do not reflect abstract thoughts of a community that imagines itself as a cultural actor in a nation-state.

The reference here is about Chinese-speaking Dungans who mostly stay in compact communities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and are descendants of political and war refugees from China's provinces of Shaanxi and Gansu who moved across the border into the territory of Tsarist Russia in the latter part of the nineteenth century after the defeat of the northwest uprising by the Imperial Ch'ing/Qing (Manchu) army. After arriving in Russian Central Asia, these early landless Chinese migrants were allowed by the Tsarist government to reclaim wasteland for farming and engage in livestock husbandry. In the early 20th century, these Chinese migrants and their descendants also actively participated in the construction of the former Soviet Union and Stalin's war against Germany in the 1940s. The Dungan community's dilemmas of identity preservation and identity creation are just one side of the story. The presence of Dungan descendants of Chinese migrants (*xinyimin* or 'new migrants') has triggered sharp response in many Central Asian societies (linked to a growing domestic politically charged perception of the 'China threat'). ¹⁴ A discreet example is the riots of 2006 in Kyrgyzstan. On 6th February 2006, ethnic clashes took place between the Dungan (called 'Tungans'/ 'Dolgans' by the Russians) youth and Turkic-speaking Kyrgyz youth in the Dungan majority village of Iskra, about 70 kilometers from Bishkek. The Dungans here were more than a majority

among Iskra' 3000 residents, but are one of the smallest minority groups in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. A brawl on 31st January escalated into large Kyrgyz demonstrations on 4-5 February demanding forcible eviction of the Dungan youth along with their families. The situation worsened as the accused allegedly fired gunshots at Kyrgyz protesters, triggering a rampage by Kyrgyz demonstrators in which again some Dungans were beaten up while their families sought refuge in a local mosque. 'Order was restored' and hundreds of Dungan families were forced to seek political asylum in neighbouring Kazakhstan for a while. Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse have expressed concern about what was considered to be an overt presence to what has transformed into graver consequences for a country like Kyrgyzstan.¹⁵

Migration Flows

It would be appropriate to also consider whether the yearning for the Kazakh homeland among the Uyghurs and Dungans whose number is about 1.1 million in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is factored on economic determinants. This vast region located in the north-west of China, adjacent to Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia and having a strong identification with a nomadic past is considered to be the new home of the minority ethnic groups in China. In Xinjiang, Kazakhs live in Urumqi and other cities, and are found dispersed mainly across the northern prefectures of Yili, Tacheng and Altai. Seeking occupational and cultural rootedness, they have embraced the idea of immigrating to Kazakhstan as a way of securing their pastoral livelihood. China's Kazakhs are attracted to leaving for Kazakhstan, where they believe they will have the freedom to migrate with their livestock. Due to the national territorial delimitation, the ethnic minorities (including nomadic populations) of the Soviet space got dislocated and their grazing lands and migration routes were bifurcated and altered to fit inside new nation states. This dispersed the Kazakhs of Mongolia from their brethren in Russia, China and Kazakhstan. Throughout the 20th century, nomadic Kazakhs, Mongolian and Kyrgyz herdsmen endured great changes in their environment and animal husbandry practices. The Soviets implemented rigorous sedentarization since the 1930s, bringing many Kazakhs under the *sovkehoz* and *kolkehoz* model of production, while allowing a continuation of limited migration of livestock. In Kazakhstan, following dissolution of Soviet Union, in the wake of societal changes, migration and displacement of nomadic population took place. Many of them did not have passports.

The Kazakhs inhabiting the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region, who chose to herd sheep and maintain livestock, also had to encounter several problems. They were restrained to camp and decamp—a process that first began in the 1950s, but have become more stringent over the years, especially since 2005. Coupled with the increasingly severe degradation of the grazing lands in both winter and summer pastures of recent years, which itself had been exacerbated by locusts, rodents and unfavourable weather conditions, the quality of pasturage for the livestock has become a grave concern across

districts and counties to Kazakh nomads, government officials and scientists alike. What is the most important factor to the success of nomadic activity – the widest possible flexibility of grazing options – has been restricted for the pastoral Kazakhs in Xinjiang.

Furthermore, this tightening of access to high quality and sufficient quantity grazing land directly affected the nomad families. Thinner sheep fetch lower prices, but the difference is made up by adding to the volume, even though this is not sustainable. As the cost of living in China has been going up rapidly, even in this remote western province, the cash income for herding families has decreased under the impact of market forces. In recent years, many families find themselves caught in a vicious cycle contributing to their own destitution. This has forced households and their extended families to employ new strategies for survival, seriously considering options like continue to go ahead with migrations and herding or stop altogether and settle, or consider emigrating to Kazakhstan heeding to the *oralman* programme. A recent study takes a new course by looking at the *oralman* programme as a pull-factor for China's Kazakhs.¹⁶ The choice was very difficult indeed. Although emigration to Kazakhstan is an opportunity for these Chinese Kazakhs especially because it gave the chance of choosing a sustainable future, it had the same level of risk as their life in China – and sometimes additional constraints.

Attracted by promises of free health and education services, the mirage of greener grass and plentiful land on which to graze their livestock, the Chinese Kazakhs have been opting for permanent migration for the first time since the short-lived exodus in the early 1960s. They believe that Kazakhstan is somewhat of a promised land, rescuing them from the exhausted environments of Chinese counties. This imagined reality is mostly anecdotally known to the families in China, usually by word of mouth from stories told by émigré family members back to visit, potentially supported by random media reports. Not only the *oralman* programme, but also the ideas and opportunities of immigration into Kazakhstan have captured the imagination of many Kazakhs living in Xinjiang. Seldom does one realize that the emigration opportunity does little to solve the ongoing problems ensuing from grassland degradation or the risk of poverty among livestock herding Kazakhs in both countries. For instance, there is little entitlement to *oralman* benefits. The *oralman* policy has spelt out a quota system (with housing benefits, employment, travel costs, educational support etc) which signifies a restrictive policy towards immigration. But in practice, more families from China have immigrated than the quota of say, 500 families from China for the year 2006. The consequence is direct: the majority of the returnees remained ineligible for full economic and educational opportunities. The policy and the quota system have been very popular, though there are many more returnees that fall outside the quota, and there have been no benefits paid out except within the quota. Some returnees even found themselves counted as stateless if they gave up their previous citizenship without being extended the Kazakhstani citizenship.

Also, Chinese policy of development of Xinjiang has resulted in restrictive flows. But usually the attraction for immigration has been immense, especially from the point of view of successive generations. Another interesting development is the development of bilateral trade between China and Central Asia and the presence of Kazakhstan as a strong player in the Central Asian region which has urged families to look for better business opportunities in Kazakhstan. Elena Sadovskaya has researched on this aspect of Chinese labour migrants in Kazakhstan—those coming for long periods of residence as *oralmans* (a large section of them being students) and those coming as trade migrants (like Dungans, Uyghurs) or as workers. There seems to be a fairly distinctive character of Chinese workers employed in the regions. Sadovskaya gives us the statistics: ‘In the 1990s, the Chinese presence was largely confined to the city of Almaty and the Almaty and Ak Tobe regions in the south whereas in the 2000s, the west of the country (Ak Tobe, Atyrau and Mangystau regions) became a significant destination. Apart from trade, the main economic sectors currently employing a Han Chinese workforce are mining (oil and gas) and small industrial production and services (including banking, hotel, restaurant, medical services etc)’.¹⁷

Besides the factor of mobility which a nomad is used to, the factor of immobility also needs to be considered. The responses of Kazakh nomads in China about settling down in Kazakhstan have differed on a case-to-case basis. For instance, families living in winter homes would have middle-aged male members who would subscribe to the option of settling down permanently in Kazakhstan, have some land, and give children a steady life. The other factor is the herding profession—to continue that requires skill and will as well as wealth—all of which have slackened over the years. For those families living in summer homes (yurts), the response is completely different—they have no reason to emigrate and settle down. Some even want to try emigrating if they can combine all activities of nomadism and sedentarization, i.e. herding, growing seeds, producing hay through division of labour among family members. Generally speaking, the idea of uniting with their brothers, i.e. the Kazakhs of Kazakhstan was extremely appealing. However, some families felt that it was far too expensive (to emigrate). The expectations were often in contrast to the *oralman* experience. The difficulties of livestock management were a major constraint that pulled them back. Social reintegration actually did not happen, reports indicate.¹⁸ This was reiterated by members of a French NGO that comprised of *oralmans* originally from the Kazakh Ili prefecture in China, who were ‘resettled in Kazakhstan’ but migrated to European cities in Holland and France. As one respondent Marip, 38 years old (in 2012) narrated his case:

I’m a Kazakh, born in China, but my grand-parents came to Gulja from Almaty region in the 1930s when Soviets forced them to accept the massive collectivization. My grand-father was a cropper and owned many hectares of lands forcefully confiscated by the Soviet regime that killed his younger brother. My parents were born in China and dreamed all their life of coming back to their ancestral homeland. But, the political context of both countries,

China and Kazakhstan, did not allow them to realize their dream until 1990 when the borders opened after the USSR's collapse. My father could not, he died in 1986. When I heard about the Oralman program promoted by Kazakh government, with my mother we decided without hesitation to go to Almaty. We felt then something really magnificent like the wind of liberty; we believed that we could leave China and its communist regime and go to live freely in Kazakhstan. There were many Kazakh from our region interested by this program and wanted to get to the country where we could speak our mother tongue and practice our own traditions and customs. You know, we are not considered as people by the Chinese who work in administration and own all the great businesses in our region. We asked the Chinese local authorities; who of course agree with Kazakh government, for a permission of departure (validity 5 years) and rest of the procedure was effected by Kazakh consular offices in China. It did not take a lot of time. Indeed, we don't have relatives in Kazakhstan, because our grand-parents had moved with all their families' members. It was just the Kazakh government generous invitation that motivated us to come and to consider all Kazakh citizens as our relatives. When we arrived in Kazakhstan, we were initially proud of being Oralmans but things, in reality, did not take place as we had foreseen and believed...

The estranged feeling is further expressed in another account of a migrant in Holland. Talmas, 43 years old, explained the reasons:

As many compatriots, I arrived to Almaty from China through the Kazakh State program for Oralmans (*sheteldegi qazaqtar* – Kazakhs from abroad - in Kazakh language). Initially, everything was fine; we had a house, work and an ambiance quite international because there were many different neighborhoods; Russian, Polish, Korean, Ukrainian, born in Kazakhstan. And we could send our children to the Kazakh school where they also learned Russian. We were happy to get all this opportunity that was offered to us by our historical homeland (...). You know, we had left China because we were not considered there as the part of the Chinese nation, where corruption and injustice are omnipresent in political and economic life. And coming to Kazakhstan, we hoped to be finally proud of being Kazakh and of having the Kazakh language and culture transmitted to us from generation to generation. But, in reality our hopes were in vain; in Kazakhstan, despite the Kazakh language being the official language of State, you must speak Russian, you have to pay backhander to study, to get your diploma and to land a job. If you have money, you are able to do everything you want. The political and economic life in society is governed by corruption; the exact situation that we had faced in China. Instead of finding again our historical homeland, we felt as foreigners and undesirable in the eyes of the local population. The Kazakhs that we believed eager of their own language and culture are still ashamed to speak Kazakh and to show their origins. Because I lived in Almaty, I talk to you about Kazakhs from Almaty. They consider other Russian speaking minorities closer to them than us. And they treated us as enemies who would leave the homeland in a difficult situation. They don't like that we came back to Kazakhstan after independence and where the government offers us social and juridical aid. Moreover, we don't have close resemblances; our Kazakh is quite different from theirs which is mixed

with Russian words as their culture was influenced by Russian culture. When I first arrived in Almaty, I felt as if I were in Europe. That's why we have difficulties integrating into Kazakh society, contrarily to other Oralman from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who speak Russian and grew up with the Soviet education.¹⁹

The alienation of the third generation is mostly because of the differing environments: Most of the Chinese Kazakhs are used to Arabic script while the older generations were accustomed to the Romanized Kazakh alphabet. Kazakh language in Kazakhstan has Cyrillic script. Their conversational Kazakh is derogatorily termed 'do revoliutsionniyyazik' or 'staryi yazik.' The language dilemma has hindered the process of social integration of the new immigrants.

In the post-disintegration period, migrant activities assumed a new turn as Sino-Kyrgyz diplomatic relations and trade ties increased and several Kyrgyz-Chinese joint ventures (in mining, metallurgy and fuel industries) within the framework of inter-governmental agreements materialized. While such joint ventures (often three years' contracts) thrive in the flourishing districts of Osh and Chui, trade ties (mostly flourishing on the basis of shuttle trade) were focused on the role of Chinese migrants in Kyrgyz market economy. They have been identified as migrants engaged in commercial activity—selling clothes and 'made in China' consumer goods and did not stay in Kyrgyzstan for a long time. *Artush* and *Kashgar*—two stores stocked with Chinese goods—opened in Naryn which is on the road to the Chinese border Torugart. Migrants and traders brought here non-durable products like sugar and rice and made profits from China-made liquor. Some of them organized wholesale purchase of Astrakhan coats and hats to be distributed during weddings or other festivals in Xinjiang.

The same trading activity was seen among Kyrgyz shuttle traders who travelled by bus or air to buy goods (like clothing and electronic equipment) and bring them back to the Kyrgyz local markets. Some of these businessmen travelled on official delegation and were successful as political figures: like Karganbek Samakov who established business contacts that helped him in achieving his political ambitions as deputy of *Jogorku Kenegesh* (Kyrgyz Parliament). Since the mid 1990s, the Kyrgyz local traders were unable to compete with Chinese businessmen. The latter were more organized in their shuttle trading activities and small scale Kyrgyz entrepreneurs gradually lost their competitive worth and started travelling less and less to China. They either bought Chinese goods from Chinese traders based in Kyrgyzstan who sold goods much cheaper and had a large clientele in Kyrgyzstan or had to give up their business due to lack of profitability. Some even were forced to migrate to Russia, thus leaving the space to Chinese traders. Chinese migrants thrived in Kyrgyz markets like Dordoi, located near the city of Bishkek and Karasuu, near Osh.

Conclusions

The tangled connections among Uyghurs of China and Central Asia have hardly received the attention they deserve. The Semirech'e homeland issue is a muted affair while the Uyghur separatist problem has become a global issue. These distinct approaches were reflected in Soviet and post-Soviet perceptions. Post-Soviet alignments have tilted the balance in China's favour. In recent times however, there has been a twist to Uyghur Studies—with studies about Uyghurs as social and cultural actors in Central Asia. Here, one is not just looking at the Uyghurs as a political opposition in a Chinese setup; on the contrary, there is a suggestion that there are myriad strategies of accommodation, adaptation and negotiation that need to be explored and recognized. Here, one is not just looking at the Uyghurs as a political opposition in a Chinese setting. Rather, one needs to address myriad strategies of accommodation, adaptation and negotiation.

Notes

¹ Discussed by Rian Thum in 'Beyond Resistance and Nationalism: local history and the case of Afaq Khoja', *Central Asian Survey*, No 1, 2012. Thum explored this subject further in his book *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014. The book revolves round the Uyghur community's imagination of the past.

² George Mitchell, Marika Vicziany and Tsui Yen Hu, *Kashgar: Oasis city on China's Old Silk Road*, London: Frances Lincoln Publishers, 2008.

³ Peter C. Perdue, 'Ecologies of Empire: From Qing Cosmopolitanism to Modern Nationalism'. This article is based on a keynote speech with the same title delivered at the 'Bordering China: Modernity and Sustainability', Berkeley Summer Research Institute on August 3, 2012. Also see special issue of *Central Asian Survey* (2009) where some articles have reflected on the local dynamics among the Uyghurs. Adila Erkin, 'Locally Modern, Globally Uyghur: Geography, Identity and Consumer Culture in Contemporary Xinjiang', *Central Asian Survey*, 28 (4), 2009; Eric Schlusser, 'History, Identity, and Mother-tongue Education in Xinjiang', *Central Asian Survey*, 28 (4), 2009.

⁴ Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke of Griffith Asia Institute in Brisbane have emphasised on Xinjiang as an ethnic issue for China and global concerns for such an ethnically disturbed zone. Mackerras, 'Xinjiang in 2013: Problems and Prospects', *Asian Ethnicity*, 2013; Clarke, 'China, Xinjiang and Internationalisation of the Uyghur issue', *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 2010.

⁵ On the one hand there was the Chinese provincial rhetoric of Uyghurs and Hans as indigenous settlers of Xinjiang. There was an alternative narrative of Soviet Turcologists like A.N. Bernshtam and S.E. Malov who wrote about indigenes of the Uyghurs, describing episodes in national liberation movement like TIRET (Turkic Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan in Kashgaria in 1932-33) and more discreetly about ETR (Eastern Turkestan Republic in the 1940s). The 'rebellion of the three prefectures' was interpreted in various ways which changed the character of memoir literature among the Uyghurs.

⁶ Kari Faugner, *Chinese Perspectives on the Dungan People and Language: A Critical Discourse Analysis on the Ambiguity of Chinese Ethnicity*, Masters' Thesis in East Asian Linguistics, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, Spring 2012, p. 9.

The author mentions the work of Jonathan N. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1997.

⁷ I got a sense of these distinct approaches during my field trip to Astana and Almaty in August 2013

⁸ According to some earlier experts, Xinjiang has always been a radical nationalist issue in China and Central Asia. Dru Gladney feels that transnational Uyghur identity has been a threat to authoritarian regimes of China and Eurasia which is why they have tried to keep Uyghur nationalists restrained through constructive engagement in state affairs. Dru C. Gladney, 'Constructing a Contemporary Uyghur National Identity: Transnationalism, Islamicization and State Representation', *Cahiers de Etude sur le Meditteranee Orientale et le monde Turco-Iranien*, No 13, Jan-Juin, 1992.

⁹ Ablet Kamalov, 'Uyghurs in the Central Asian Republics: Past and Present', in Colin Mackerras and Michael Clarke eds *China, Xinjiang and Central Asia*, London: Routledge, 2009.

¹⁰ Kabirow, *Ocherki Istorii Uigurov Sovjetskovo Kazakhstana* (1975) followed by *The Uighurs are Autochthonous to Semirechie*, 1988.

¹¹ Rian Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014, pp. 19-21.

¹² Natsuko Oka, 'Transnationalism as a Threat to State Security? Case Studies on Uighurs and Uzbeks of Kazakhstan', [http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no14_ses/14_oka.pdf]

¹³ Film *Zamanai*, cited in Alexander C. Diener, *One Homeland or Two? The Nationalization and Transnationalization of Mongolia's Kazakhs*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009, pp. 275-278.

¹⁴ Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh, 'Chinese Migration and the Changing Socio-political Fabric of Central Asian Republics', *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 2, August 2015.

¹⁵ S. Peyrouse, 'Facing the Challenges of Separatism: The EU, Central Sebastian Asia and the Uyghur Issue', EUCAM (EU-Central Asia Monitoring), No 4, 2009.

¹⁶ Astrid Cerny, 'Going where the Grass is Greener: China Kazakhs and the *Oralman* Immigration Policy in Kazakhstan', *Pastoralism*, Vol. 1 No. 2, July 2010.

¹⁷ Elena Sadovskaya, *Chinese Labour Migration to Kazakhstan at the Beginning of the 21st century*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2012.

¹⁸ Balihar Sanghera, Elmira Satybaldieva, Adil Rodionov, Sabira Serikzhanova, Nurlan Choibekov, and Kunduz Sultanmuratova, *Illegal Settlements and City Registration in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: Implications for Legal Empowerment, Politics, and Ethnic Tensions*, Open Society Occasional Paper Series, No 5, April 2012.

¹⁹ Ulugbek Badalov, *The Oralmans: Migration of Ethnic Kazakhs from China to Europe*, [excerpts from Ph.D. dissertation in political anthropology, School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS), Paris (2011)].

Returnees in Afghanistan: Impediments to Reintegration

By

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Repatriation brings forth issues like the capacity for absorption, possibilities of sustainable reintegration, the role and importance of the migratory networks and the issue of forced and voluntary return. Afghan migration, both social and economic is not new and refugee/returnee movements are and have been part of larger social and economic processes that Afghans have engaged themselves in and developed for generations if not centuries. This has been both a source of strength and weakness for Afghans as this mobility has given them an important tool for coping with adversity but it has clouded their legal status, making it difficult to provide for their protection and search for durable solutions.¹ Many of these people are neither refugees nor returnees, strictly speaking as mobility is so common that it is a rule rather than an exception and that refugee returns are not final in the traditional sense.

Thus while assessing Afghan migration a rigid causal framework may not work but is often explained in terms of violent conflict or the lure of labour markets in neighbouring countries or urban centres. Thus it is usually the political or economic causes which are used to distinguish between involuntary and voluntary migration respectively.² Afghans are found in a range of places which includes countries in the neighbourhood (primarily Pakistan and Iran) and further abroad, forming networks, which are connected through the continuous circulation of people, money, goods and information. Neither the definition of “refugee” in international texts nor the various typologies of migration offer a satisfactory analytical framework to explain and understand the migratory strategies developed by the Afghans. It is becoming fairly evident that this primarily causal framework may not do justice to the complexity of today’s global migration flows, especially those involving Afghans since migration has been due to multiple causes and through centuries.

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Refugee Watch, 45, June 2015

Thus the paper argues that if we acknowledge the realities in the region, then the legal categories that define refugees or returnees do not necessarily describe Afghans as movement and intermixture along the border is a reality that cannot be ignored. The paper also delves into the issue of repatriation of Afghans from the region in the post-2001 period from the point of view of sustainable reintegration of the refugees and highlights the problems associated with any desperate effort at full repatriation. It shows how there is an apparent contradiction in the fact that the capacity of Afghanistan to absorb more returnees is limited while on the other hand return programmes of international bodies have not been completely disastrous. As a backdrop to the analysis a review of the major waves of conflict-induced displacement is highlighted. By way of conclusion the paper argues in favour of more flexible definitions for the moving Afghans and intermediate solutions for them in the border regions which should include solutions that involve exploring ways to guarantee refugee and returnee rights within a broader human security framework.

Migratory Networks and the Cross-Border Flows

Migration is part of the Afghan social and cultural landscape and Afghans have had a long history of migration in its various forms.³ Seasonal movements of nomads, trade between nomads and sedentary farmers, movement of mountain people to urban centres or to lowlands to find menial jobs; movement of pilgrims, soldiers or refugees have been part of the cross-border movement since ages. Informal nature of cross border movements and migration for social and economic reasons are thus common. So although the connection between conflict and refugee movements is real yet new approaches are needed to understand migration in the region.

Population movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan or Afghanistan and Iran go beyond refugee or traditional tribal movements as the population consists mainly of temporary and cyclical migrants who travel for a mixed variety of reasons, influenced by social, cultural and economic factors and that there is a changing nature of population movements in the region. Migration is a way of life for many Afghans and is used as a livelihoods strategy. Many Afghans are now integrally part of a very dynamic situation: they cross the border to Pakistan for multiple and combined reasons -economic, social, medical and cultural.⁴ Return to Afghanistan does not necessarily mean the end of displacements and may prompt onward passage, following a pattern of multidirectional cross-border movements. The cross border movement remains informal at all levels.

All these movements are facilitated by channels of pre-established transnational networks which exist between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, as the movement of individuals to seek work, to escape drought or to flee war has been a common experience in the whole region. Transnational networks have been shown to be crucial in providing support and information to migrants in Iran and Pakistan, as well as in determining the selection of the place of destination (based also on the presence of relatives, neighbours and

friends). Transnational networks act as initial safety networks. Ideally, relatives or friends in the different neighbourhoods of the migrants' arrival provide the initial care for new arrivals. They lend the money to pay the smuggler, offer a place to stay for the first couple of nights, lend or give some money to buy suitable clothing, provide start-up funds for a business, give advice on where to find employment, and possibly make introductions to potential employers.⁵ The availability of acquaintances offers support in an environment which is perceived to be foreign, in particular for first-time arrivals. Sometimes relatives provided the initial funds for settlement while others indicated that they had been given this as a loan. The labour opportunities in Iran for instance and an average salary that is four times higher than in Afghanistan are major pull factors for many Afghans.⁶ Pull factors in Iran include a strong demand among employers for cheap, flexible and reliable migrant labour. The existence of a transnational social network consisting of relatives or friends in Iran also makes it easier for Afghan migrants to live and work in the informal job market.⁷ If taken in by relatives or friends upon arrival, and depending on the composition of the household, the migrant may be expected to move out and start his life in Iran as a migrant labourer. Their migration is motivated by economic and labour considerations and is unlikely to end. Given the relative size in the economies of Afghanistan and its neighbours, such movements are likely to expand and diversify.

Conflict, State Fragility and Displacement in Afghanistan

Apart from economic and social causes, migration and refugee movements have largely been due to conflict and state fragility. Forced migration may be the result of political factors, such as gross violations of human rights, economic and environmental factors, but armed conflicts have always been a major cause of the involuntary displacement of people. It is proven that the countries that produced the largest number of refugees and asylum seekers are those experiencing long-standing conflicts, such as former Palestine, Afghanistan, Sudan and Myanmar (more than 500,000 each) and countries like Sudan, Congo-Kinshasa, Colombia, Uganda and Angola headed the list of IDPs (ranging between one million to close to five million) (USCRI 2004). Again there has been particular interest among both researchers and policymakers in understanding the complex relationship between state fragility and violent conflict.

In the past decade state fragility has become an increasingly popular concept for both policymakers and researchers working on issues related to international development, humanitarian relief and global conflict. When talking about reduced capacities of the State, different terms are being used such as 'failed state', 'state's experiencing severe stress' and so on. In failed states, the collapse of central authority is complete and there is complete attrition of state apparatus. On the other hand 'fragile states' are those whose 'authority/legitimacy' is being contested intensely. As a consequence the conflicts that emerge tend to be resolved often through violent means. Often these conflicts tend to overlap with 'ethnic identities,' which tend to generate

narratives of exploitation and grievances. Such process makes the conflict intractable and sustains the fragility of the state. Evidently, all this has human consequences in terms of loss of human lives and forced migration.

Afghanistan has seen a large-scale conflict-induced displacement and state failure. As a result of more than three decades of war and instability, millions of Afghans have fled for protection in Pakistan, Iran, and other neighbouring countries. As of December 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that nearly 2.5 million Afghans, including 1.5 million registered refugees, were living in Pakistan, and 950,000 registered Afghan refugees were living in Iran. In this case, the Soviet intervention in the country and its aftermath resulted in one of the world's largest refugee crises. In December 1979, the Soviets during the height of Cold War, intervened in Afghanistan leading to a response from the USA and unleashing a war-like situation on the civilian population. By 1981, 1.5 million refugees had taken refuge in neighbouring Pakistan. During the Soviet occupation, IDPs fled their villages for the relative safety of major cities such as Kabul, Ghazni, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif and the population of Kabul increased by 100 percent in less than a decade. This situation changed in 1992 when the mujahideen entered Kabul.⁸ At the height of the Cold War, Western governments capitalised on Afghans' anti-Soviet sentiment with Pakistan providing a territorial base, providing massive quantities of military equipment and financial support to the mujahideen. By 1986, as many as 5 million Afghans were refugees in Pakistan and Iran.

After almost ten years of war that had become a liability both politically and financially, the USSR agreed in 1988 to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. Upon their departure, the Soviets put in place a communist administration headed by Mohammed Najibullah, an Afghan communist. Fighting continued as the mujahideen then resisted the new government. The UN facilitated peace negotiations between Najibullah and the mujahideen in an effort to pull together a settlement which would bring an end to the fighting. In 1988 the USSR formally agreed to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. This prompted more than 900,000 refugees to return home.⁹

Following its exit from Afghanistan, the USSR collapsed signalling the end of the Cold War and a reduction in funds for those groups fighting the West's proxy wars. This prompted the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) to establish programmes relating to Afghanistan in preparation for repatriation of Afghan refugees. In anticipation of refugee return, UNHCR and other UN agencies and NGOs focused their work on rehabilitation efforts inside the country. But while the West had finished waging war, local actors had not. By 1990, with Najibullah's government still in place, fighting continued throughout the country. While some refugees were returning in small numbers, most were on the other side of the border waiting for the fall of Najibullah and the ascendancy of the *mujahideen*. Despite the absence of substantial numbers of returnees, rehabilitation efforts in rural and urban areas continued. In April 1992, the *mujahideen* captured Kabul, Najibullah was killed, and the communist era in Afghanistan drew to a close. This led to a wave of return with as many as

900,000 refugees repatriating voluntarily in 1992 and a further 500,000 in 1993.¹⁰

Throughout the repatriation, and in the reconstruction effort which followed, UNHCR played a key role. 'Operation Salam' aimed to create the conditions for return including mine clearance, health programmes, rehabilitation of essential infrastructure such as the water supply, and the provision of services such as health and education. A report of Operation Salam showed that while certain groups of Afghans returned, other groups fled making the situation unchanged. But what really changed was the capacity of UN and other groups to have access inside the country.¹¹ From the outset, the programme was fraught with financial, logistical, political and security problems. By 1993, the rate of return had declined. Although repatriation continued throughout the remainder of the 1990s, it was never highly significant. This is a reflection of the ever changing political and security situation in Afghanistan as well as access to assistance in Pakistan and Iran.

The conflict situation became critical when mujahideen parties battling for power created a new era of conflict which led to further displacement after the Soviet withdrawal. The fight for the control of Kabul, which resulted in the destruction of large portions of the city, led to the exodus of more than 100,000 Kabulis. Similarly, Kandahar and other parts of the country were carved up between commanders, making travel within and between cities risky for both civilians and humanitarian workers. Many of those who had returned home after as many as 13 years in exile, were once again forced to return to Pakistan.¹²

Even during the Taliban period migration was primarily due to the continual war between Taliban and its opposition groups and also due to massive drought. By 1994, the movement which came to be known as the Taliban had begun to take shape in *madrassas* in Pakistan. Initially the Taliban gained support in the south of Afghanistan, largely on the basis that they were able to bring security to the region. This allowed refugees from just over the Pakistani border to voluntarily return to their homes, agricultural lands and orchards. As the movement grew – both in popular support and in territory - restrictive policies grounded in conservative interpretations of Islam and *Pushtunwali* (Pashtun tribal codes) were imposed. These groups were in the majority in refugee camps in Pakistan during the first wave of displacement.¹³ Taliban military victories throughout 1996 and into 1998 continued to generate more refugees – predominantly from the North (non-Pashtuns) and urban educated elite – as they fled to escape fighting or ethnic persecution by the Pashtun dominated Taliban. The battle for Mazar led to an exodus of 20,000 Afghans and by 1999, a further 100,000 refugees had fled, either to escape the fighting, or in fear of ethnic persecution by the Pashtun dominated Taliban. However after capturing most of Afghanistan, the Taliban suffered defeat at Mazar-i-Sharif.¹⁴

By the end of July 1997, approximately 2.61 million refugees had returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and 1.33 million from Iran. An estimated 1.2 million refugees remained in Pakistan and another 1.4 million in Iran. Repatriation from Pakistan was more than that from Iran. In 1994,

103,000 repatriated from Pakistan and 227,000 from Iran. Even in 1995, more people repatriated from Iran - 195,000 repatriated from Iran and 153,000 from Pakistan. But it is significant to note that in 1996, repatriation from Iran fell drastically. Only 14,000 Afghans repatriated while from Pakistan 121,000 repatriated. In 1997, only 834 Afghans repatriated from Iran while 52,000 repatriated from Pakistan.¹⁵

On April 26 1998 the warring Afghan faction evolved a five- point formula for continuing talks aimed at ending the eighteen years of war. It brought the Taliban and the Northern Alliance face-to-face for the first time in more than a year. However, there was a clear divergence of views between the two sides as to the precise agenda of the talks and Taliban leaders opposed discussing political issues. On May 5, Taliban forces launched fresh attacks on opposition positions in northern Afghanistan. Probably the failure of the peace talks heralded a fresh Taliban offensive to capture the remaining one-third of the country outside its control. Taliban attacks on Shias and gender discrimination had drawn the entire international community against it. Repeated peace talks have failed. On July 19, 1998, the Taliban ordered the deletion of all secular terms from Afghanistan's constitution and applicable laws to bring their administration fully in line with Islamic laws, reported *Nation* from Kabul. In August the Taliban after capturing the key town of Shiberghan made further advances, coming close to the strategic northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif and capturing it on August 8. Tensions mounted when Iran conducted a military build up along the Iran-Afghan border when their diplomats were killed in Afghanistan.¹⁶

Despite the uncertain situation in their home country refugees have been returning to Afghanistan. By mid-1998, 4 million refugees returned to Afghanistan, joining 2.7 million returnees from Pakistan since 1988 and 1.3 million from the Islamic Republic of Iran. As fighting dragged on and the country was gripped by a nation-wide drought, by summer 2001 an estimated 900,000 Afghans were internally displaced and another 3.6 million were refugees, some of whom had been refugees for over 20 years.

Post-2001 Returnees: A Unique Phenomenon

The ousting of the Taliban from power and the signing of the Bonn Accord led to the establishment of a new government in Kabul and led to a situation where hopeful Afghans living across the borders planned to return. This situation in Afghanistan was often dubbed by the west as 'post-conflict' in which the UNHCR facilitated the return of refugees and IDPs displaced due predominantly to conflict and drought. Of the neighboring countries, most of the returns came from Pakistan. A tripartite agreement, signed after the establishment of new government resulted in the return of more than 1.7 million refugees between the beginning of March and the end of October 2002. This is despite the fact that an agreement was not put in place until nine months after the initial flow of refugees began. Of that population, an estimated 500,000 went to Kabul. Despite the agreement, return slowed in late 2002 to a rate of 10,000 people per week from a previous rate of 100,000 per

week. This was attributed to the onset of winter. At the end of 2002, an estimated 1.8 million refugees remained in Pakistan.

The voluntary repatriation of Afghans from Iran was based on a tripartite accord between Afghanistan, Iran and UNHCR signed in Geneva on 3 April, 2002. The agreement provided a framework for the expected annual repatriation of 400,000 Afghans from Iran.¹⁷ The voluntary repatriation programme which began in April 2001 resulted in the return of 300,000 Afghans. Of that number, 224,432 received assistance, while 71,099 returned unassisted. For those who did seek assistance, transportation to the border, small cash grants and assistance packages were offered to facilitate return. In Tajikistan, some Afghans faced deportations in September 2002. UNHCR, however, was able to gain assurances that those Afghans which remained in the country would not be forcibly removed. As of October 2002, UNHCR had assisted more than 9,200 Afghans to return home voluntarily from Tajikistan, while approximately 3,000 refugees remained. By the end of 2002, the overall situation in the country was more positive than it had been in almost 20 years.

Despite large numbers of returnees, an estimated 3.4 million Afghans were still refugees at the end of 2002. This figure included the 1.5 million refugees living outside the UNHCR-administered refugee camps. The bulk of the refugees remained in Pakistan and Iran. By 2005, Germany hosted the largest number of recognized Afghan refugees outside the region totalling 47,000. This was followed by the Netherlands with 26,000 and the UK with 24,000. Canada hosts around 15,000 Afghan refugees, mostly people that have resettled from the region. Significantly, following the ousting of the Taliban from power, there was an 80 per cent drop in asylum applications in all industrialized countries between 2001 and 2004 with 54,000 Afghans applying in 2001 compared with 8,000 in 2004.

The Returnee Psyche

Numerous researchers have documented how repatriation often proves to be significantly less rewarding and far more disillusioning than the resilient refugees who return home had anticipated – due to a variety of factors including resentment from the inhabitants, being perceived as outsiders, and disinterest in their stories, stressful economic circumstances and unexpected changes during their time away.¹⁸ In short, as Harrell- Bond and Gatson have observed:¹⁹

Because the return is so strongly associated in the minds of exiles with the end of a traumatic period, the unexpected differences and difficulties can make going 'home' even more painful than the original exile.

However there are certain factors which may have driven the Afghan refugees back home. Whether a longing of going back home was one is not certain because notions of the 'home' are often transformed by the experience of exile.²⁰ Whether again the assistance that was offered to them by

international agencies in order to return was lucrative enough is not certain as assistance package is not alluring enough to motivate them to return. But the fact that assistance was available may have sent out a signal to the refugees that it was time for them to go “home” and may have acted as a catalyst. Again there were high expectations of the transformations that were supposed to take place in Afghanistan in terms of reconstruction and investments.²¹ Obviously they believed that peace and security was returning. Some refugees may have returned due to police harassment or government policies. These atrocities and lack of opportunity might have acted as push factors for the refugees to return. The encouraging messages and broadcasts may have enabled them to take a decision to repatriate.

Challenges Associated with Repatriation

A number of issues – both in the neighbouring countries of asylum and in Afghanistan – continued to represent cause for concern in the effort to uphold the voluntary nature of the repatriation. Firstly, Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the first part of 2002 faced harassment and deportations, particularly in urban areas. This calls into question the voluntary nature of repatriation. Despite this, it is generally accepted that most returnees did so on their own volition. While more families did return than in past repatriation efforts, accurate information as to the conditions in the country were less than optimal raising concerns over the durability of the solution over the long term.

Secondly, in parts of the country, repatriation in ‘safety and dignity’ could not be assured. Afghanistan was heavily mined, representing considerable risk to the population and particularly those who wished to return to rural areas. The lack of access to productive agricultural land due to land mines prevented some returnees from going home instead they opted to return to urban areas within the country. In addition, political and ethnic rivalries persisted between regional factions making some areas insecure for the indigenous population, as well as impeding access of protection monitors and humanitarian workers, and thus hampering repatriation efforts.

Thus despite the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, security and stability remained a far cry. State fragility was stark and warlords controlled parts of the country, while the central government remained weak, which made return and rehabilitation difficult for the millions of displaced Afghans. Such state fragility directly impacts the refugee situation, primarily on issues related to rehabilitation or reintegration. Although rightly seen as a massive vote of confidence in the new, UN-backed Afghanistan Transitional Administration (ATA), the return of so many people over such a short period, to a country devastated by 23 years of war and nearly four years of drought, was causing widespread anxiety. Many of those who had returned were finding it difficult or impossible to survive in their home areas and the slow arrival of money pledged by donor states for the reconstruction of Afghanistan was threatening the ‘sustainability’ of the return movement.

Afghanistan's immense poverty, poor socio-economic indicators, its on-going security difficulties, decision of the international troops to pull out and the massive continuing migration across its borders all suggested that an exclusive emphasis on repatriation was neither 'feasible nor desirable'²². The capacity of Afghanistan to absorb more returnees was limited but not totally ruinous. But the complex myriad of Afghanistan's institutional weakness, conflicting land laws and regulations, the multiple layers of disputes, the weak judicial system, the powerful elites that act with impunity, and the predominantly landless nature of returning refugees, were some of the most serious obstacles to successful reintegration of Afghan returnees. Without access to land, it was extremely difficult to provide other basic services to returnees. As a result, they continue to migrate to the urban informal settlements *en masse*, focusing and coordinating development strategies simultaneously on both sides of the border to provide a better foundation for monitoring and normalizing the extensive cross-border traffic.

Issues in Migration Management

An indispensable part of a comprehensive approach to migration management aiming at orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants is Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR)²³ aiming at those who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries. As mentioned earlier Afghanistan in the post-2001 phase saw an overwhelming number of refugees returning from the neighbouring countries. UNHCR's initial plans for reintegration assistance had to be scaled down drastically because the returnees so greatly exceeded the number budgeted for. Meanwhile, reconstruction assistance was taking much longer than expected to materialise, and calls for the extension of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) beyond Kabul continued to fall on deaf ears.²⁴

About a million people were internally displaced, partly by the effects of the drought and partly because of ethnic unrest in the north. The result was that more and more of the relatively meagre funds pledged by the international community for the reconstruction of Afghanistan were being spent on life-saving emergency assistance. UNHCR now found itself in a familiar situation – 'alone on the dance floor,' vainly encouraging its development partners to get to their feet.²⁵

An evident problem was that the donors were complaining about UNHCR overreaching itself by getting involved in 'development' rather than 'relief;' the Afghan government was complaining that precious development funds were being used merely to keep its citizens alive; and many returnees were complaining that they had been encouraged by promises of assistance to return to a situation in which they were worse off than in the country of refuge. The return of Afghan refugees in such large numbers in 2002 was good news for the major institutional actors. Interestingly, for the Afghan government it could be seen as a vote of confidence, for the US and its allies, a popular support for the overthrow of the Taliban, for the governments of Pakistan and Iran, it represented a reduction in what they saw as the unfair

economic burden of hosting Afghan refugees. And for UNHCR, it forcefully demonstrated its 'relevance' to the international community.

It was reported that for the official 'beneficiaries,' however, the picture is hazy. This is, first, because of the extreme heterogeneity of their circumstances and, second, because so little is known about the actual conditions in areas of return. But it is definite that many returnees found themselves in a worse position after their return than before, and that the scale and speed of the return helped to divert yet more of the limited funds available for reconstruction into emergency assistance. This raises questions about the term 'facilitated' return. This term is used by UNHCR when it is assisting refugees to return to 'post-conflict' situations which, as in Afghanistan today, it does not regard as suitable for "promoted" return. The distinction is difficult to make in practice.

The suspicion arises, therefore, that it is a semantic device that allows the international community to exert pressure on refugees, in the form of 'encouraging messages,' to return to fundamentally unsatisfactory situations, while appearing to stand by internationally agreed norms of voluntary repatriation. This may explain why UNHCR itself sometimes seems uncertain whether it is 'facilitating' or 'promoting' return, as when the success of a supposedly 'facilitated' return operation is measured in terms of the number who have repatriated. What is evident is that many of the urban settlements to which refugees have returned are 'informal' or lacking in basic services. Ongoing difficulty in resolving land disputes is proving to be a major hindrance to reconstruction and investment. Within this context, households must build sustainable livelihoods to ensure a successful return and reintegration.

The Issue of Second and Third Generation Refugees

More than two decades of protracted conflict from the late 1970s onward saw Afghan refugee communities settle around the world. At the end of 2007, Afghanistan was still the source of the world's largest number of refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). While Afghans are dispersed among 72 different countries, 96 percent of displaced Afghans remain in Pakistan and Iran. The majority of those who remain in Pakistan and Iran have lived in exile for over 20 years, and half of them are estimated to have been born outside Afghanistan. Currently, around 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees are still living in Pakistan and Iran—the majorities are in their second or even third generation of displacement who have never seen Afghanistan or have never come for visits.²⁶ In Pakistan, 74 percent of the Afghan population is under 28 years old, 4 while 71 percent of the Afghan population in Iran is 29 years old or younger.

In both contexts, these second generation Afghans have grown up in very different circumstances to those of their parents and peers in Afghanistan. For these young refugees, returning to their "homeland" does not necessarily mean returning 'home'.²⁷ Understanding the characteristics of this significant group of young Afghans, their perceptions toward return, and

their reintegration experiences holds critical importance for policymaking around the issues of: facilitating the return and reintegration of young Afghans; securing the lives and livelihoods of the multiple generations of Afghans remaining in exile; and managing continuing cross-border population movements to the benefit of both the migrants and the sending and receiving countries. Afghans refugees, returning to one's homeland does not necessarily mean 'return', as a majority of them have had little or no experience of living in Afghanistan, while they have profound attachment to Pakistan or Iran – the place they know best.²⁸

There are complexities of deciding to return to one's 'homeland,' the influence of ties to Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, as well as the less visible social and emotional reintegration trajectories of returnee respondents, including the crucial links between these issues and material challenges of reintegration. The reactions to the environment in which they find themselves upon returning to Afghanistan and the various adaptation processes through which individuals undergo is an important area of study. Often the way in which individuals find meaning for themselves in relation to Afghanistan as their homeland is one of the crucial factors affecting their perceptions of return and future outlook. The process of reintegration in their "homeland" is not a simple geographical movement of population, and these second-generation Afghan refugees are not homogeneous. They have diverse interests and intentions depending on individual background, experiences, place of residence and opportunities—all of which were influenced by changing political and social dynamics. These elements need to be carefully considered to support their permanent settlement in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

In the case of Afghan refugees, repatriation has not been the solution many had initially hoped for primarily because of weak institutional capacities of the state. The fact that an interim government was established in Afghanistan in 2002 after the removal of the Taliban regime had in fact led to a peculiar phenomenon where both Iran and Pakistan started officially talking about full repatriation of the Afghans and threatened closure of refugee camps. Thus the real issues in sustainable reintegration and the importance and role of such migratory networks between these countries came to the fore. The capacity of Afghanistan to absorb more returnees was stretched. On the other hand, research suggests that returns program since 2002 may not have been as ruinous as some feared. Afghans do not appear to feel they were forced to repatriate, and they have moved back to an Afghanistan that closely matches their own economic circumstances. Indeed, given the lack of regulation at the border with Pakistan and the continued ability of Afghans to work in Pakistan and especially Iran, the status quo may not have been all that different had assisted returns been much fewer — that is, many Afghans would have continued to live and work on both sides of the border, crossing frequently for social and economic reasons. At the community level, reintegration of refugees and IDPs into the social and economic fabric was being addressed

through targeted assistance which addresses severe deficits with regards to access to infrastructure and services in selected vulnerable communities with high levels of returnees and IDPs in a way that builds community cohesion and reduces social exclusion.

Also it is noticed that foreign actors in Afghanistan are often criticised for failing to align themselves around a common set of objectives culminating in the formation of a strong state. It is argued that each actor pursued their own military, political and economic interests which perpetuated the weakness of the Afghan state. The state-building agenda in Afghanistan, which should have gradually built the infrastructural power of the state to overcome its weakness, was overshadowed by the short-term stability and international security imperatives. The emphasis in the development literature that state incapacity is an impediment to development²⁹ and in the discourses on international security that state weakness, failure or collapse generates terrorism, HIV/AIDS, instability and refugees among other problems³⁰ has brought the state back into academic and policy debates. The problem of state weakness and failure is thus seen to be at the heart of a worldwide systemic crisis that constitutes the most serious challenge to global stability in the new millennium. This perspective ensures that state-building, 'constructing or reconstructing institutions of governance capable of providing citizens with physical and economic security'³¹ will remain a preoccupation of the international community for some time to come. If the problem emanates from state weakness, failure or collapse,³² then the solution naturally seems to be state-building. But whether international efforts at state-building provide a solution is doubtful.

Generally it is observed that the ability of the government to take full responsibility for the assistance needs of the returning population proved an impossible task, given that it is almost completely reliant on foreign aid. The Government of Afghanistan and the international community have had to address, from 2002 onward, critical problems of security, demobilisation of combatants, facilitating the return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs, and the establishment of state infrastructure against the backdrop of serious deprivation and social vulnerability. Measures to ensure the viability of return have been undertaken on a number of fronts and for most refugees, their search for employment, adequate and affordable housing, reclamation of property and reintegration into communities has been loaded with difficulty. At the same time, repatriation becomes difficult or in some cases impossible as peace and security remains elusive in some parts of the country. The process of reconstruction, state-building and the establishment of peace and security might create opportunities which may make reintegration a success. However, Afghanistan's development indicators continue to be dismal with an estimated 20-40 per cent of rural Afghans being malnourished, and roughly 70 per cent of the population living on less than USD 2 a day, over two-thirds of Afghans over the age of 15 illiterate and one in five children die before they reach their fifth birthday.

To find durable solutions to the issue of returning refugees is very difficult. Internationally, steps like - working towards the prevention of the

conflict; providing immediate assistance to the displaced people; providing skill training for forced migrants; repatriating them; rehabilitating them in new environments; encouraging integration in either the homeland or a new region may be seen as potential solutions. But there is a lack of cohesive and combined approach to resolve the issues facing the returnees. A holistic approach could include social inclusion and anti-discrimination policies - non-discriminatory treatment of all Afghans—including returnees, creating employment opportunities, especially for youth from socially and economically underprivileged backgrounds, opportunities in higher education, which are not readily available to Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, ensuring physical security through police reform and protection. Even though such opportunities are created one must understand that the second generation refugees may not be willing to voluntarily return in the future. Furthermore, the capacity of Afghanistan to absorb the vast numbers of refugees who remain in these neighbouring countries requires continuous, realistic re-examination and a consistent humanitarian approach.

Notes

¹Daniel A Kronenfeld, *Can Afghanistan Cope with Returnees? Can Returnees Cope in Afghanistan*, Middle East Institute, MEI-FRS (c), January 2011.

²Alessandro Monsutti, *Afghan Transnational Networks: Looking beyond Repatriation*, AREU Synthesis Paper, August 2006.

³Alessandro Monsutti, 'Afghan Migratory Strategies and the Three Solutions to the Refugee Problem,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 27.1, pp 58-73.

⁴UNHCR: *Study on Cross Border Population Movements between Afghanistan and Pakistan*, June 2009.

⁵UNHCR and AREU: E. Stigter, *Transnational Networks and Migration from Faryab to Iran*.

⁶ ACBAR: *Afghan Refugees/Returnees: Challenges & Opportunities*, The Region's First Coordination Workshop, , Kabul, 21 August, 2014.

⁷UNHCR News Stories: *Manage Afghan Labour Migration to Curb Irregular Flow to Iran, Study Urges*, 11 December, 2008.

⁸Those who had fled organised a resistance movement known as the *mujabideen* (holy warriors) in an effort to fight jihad (holy war) to rid Afghanistan of Soviet infidels (non-believers).

⁹*Causes and Consequences of Forced Migration*, Forced Migration Online, <http://www.forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/afghanistan/causes-and-consequences-of-forced-migration>.

¹⁰*Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?* Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), October 2012.

¹¹ Operation Salam, Office of the United Nations co-ordinator for humanitarian and economic assistance programmes relating to Afghanistan, Second Consolidated Report, Geneva, October 1989.

¹² Rhea Abraham, 'The Afghanistan Refugee Crisis: Implications for Pakistan and Iran,' *Air Power Journal*, 8.3, 2013, pp 189-208.

¹³ Teresa Poppelwell, *Afghanistan*, Forced Migration Online, July 2007.

¹⁴Arpita Basu Roy, 'Afghanistan: Seven Phases of War and the Exodus', *Refugee Watch*, 5 and 6, June 1999.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶*Tensions Mount between Iran, Afghanistan's Taliban Diplomats' Bodies Returned to Iran*, CNN, September 14, 1998.

<<http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/9809/14/iran.afghan.border/>>.

¹⁷<http://www.forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/afghanistan/causes-and-consequences-of-forced-migration>.

¹⁸Roy J. Eidelson and Rebecca Horn, 'Who Wants to Return Home? A Survey of Sudanese Refugees in Kakuma', Kenya, *Refuge* (Canada's Journal on Refugees) <http://refuge.journals.yorku.ca>.

¹⁹ Cited in Eidelson and Rebecca Horn, *Who Wants to Return Home?*

²⁰ David Turton and Peter Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*, Afghan Research And Evaluation Unit (AREU) Report, December 2002.

²¹The refugees were flooded with many encouraging messages about huge amounts of aid that would be flooding relayed by the BBC's Pashto and Dari services and by the Iranian and Pakistani press, T.V. and radio.

²² Kronenfeld, *Can Afghanistan Cope with Returnees?*

²³ Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) is an indispensable part of a comprehensive approach to migration management of IOM aiming at orderly and humane return and reintegration of migrants who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin.

²⁴ Colin McIntyre, *Refugee Repatriation was 'Premature'*, Global Voices Asia, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 21 February, 2005.

²⁵ David Turton and Peter Marsden, *Taking Refugees for a Ride?*

²⁶ Magdalena Mis, *Number of Afghan Refugees Returning Home from Pakistan Surges*, UNHCR, 16 July, 2015.

²⁷ *Searching for My Homeland: Dilemmas between Borders - Experiences of Young Afghans Returning "Home" from Pakistan and Iran*, AREU Report, Relief Web, 31 July, 2009.

²⁸ Mamiko Saito, *Second-Generation Afghans In Neighbouring Countries: From Mohajer to Hamwatan: Afghans Return Home*, AREU, December 2007.

²⁹ The World Bank, *The State in a Changing World*, Vol. 1., Oxford University Press, New York, 1997, p. 278.

³⁰ Stephen D. Krasner and Carlos Pascual, 'Addressing State Failure', *Foreign Affairs* 84 (July/August 2005); Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century*, New York: Cornell University Press 2004; Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, New York: Oxford University Press 2008.

³¹ David Chandler, *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-building*, Pluto, London, 2006, p. 1.

³² State weakness, failure and collapse have been defined in a number of ways which are often overlapping and controversial. A state can be defined as weak when it lacks the 'capacities to penetrate society, regulate social relationships, extract resources, and appropriate or use resources in determined ways.' See Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Marginality and Migration: The Plight of Persecuted Religious Minorities of Afghanistan

By

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Introduction

In most cases, minorities try to maintain neutrality in the face of internal conflict and they depend on the state institutions for the protection of their rights and security. Their situation becomes particularly challenging when the state structures are weak as different vested groups tend to take advantage of the situation to promote their own interests. Discriminatory socio-economic development policies lead to disgruntlements and the disadvantaged groups undergo further sense of exclusion. People belonging to minority communities in Afghanistan endured years of repression and were systematically targeted as the civil war erupted in the 1990s. Structural failure and rising tempo of Islamic fundamentalism were followed by internal conflict. After the Soviet backed government collapsed, the leaders of Islamic fundamentalist parties declared the establishment of an Islamic state but failed to resolve their own differences, which led to subsequent infighting and wars among them rendering the state structures factious and weak. Religious non-Muslim minorities like Sikhs and Hindus were systematically targeted by Islamic warriors, in the war of ethnic cleansing that followed after the Soviet withdrawal, forcing many of them to flee Afghanistan.

Soviet intervention of Afghanistan and the subsequent phase after its withdrawal has captured substantive international attention. Extensive research had been produced that reflected on various aspects of the country but most importantly on the ethno-sectarian conflicts since the creation of a nation state in Afghanistan in the eighteenth century. However the plight of persecuted religious minorities of Afghanistan remained a grossly neglected

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Refugee Watch, 45, June 2015.

topic. This paper thereby, aspires to throw some light at the condition of the little-studied communities in their home and host countries.

Hindus and Sikhs of Afghanistan: Pre Conflict Phase

Roger Ballard observed, that give the fact that an overwhelming majority of Afghans are Muslims by faith, the Hindus and Sikhs are routinely identified with the Indian subcontinent.¹ He further concludes that Hindus and Sikhs residing in Afghanistan must by definition be of Indian origin who found their way to the highlands of Afghanistan, and beyond that into the steppes of Central Asia in the distant past. On the other hand Hafizullah Emadi argues that Hindus and Sikhs are one of the indigenous people of Afghanistan.² Because of the common cultural heritage that the people of northern India and Afghanistan shared in the past, this was highly probable. For instance, Buddhism that emerged in the subcontinent established its influence in various parts of Afghanistan. It is believed that Buddhists converted to the new religion as they saw Islam as compatible and appreciated the symbiotic relationship with trade. Sabuktigin's successor Mahmood of Ghazni (998-1030) destroyed Hindu temples and enslaved Hindu warriors in Afghanistan as he expanded his rule eastward. Emadi observed that successive authoritarian leaders used professional Hindus and Sikhs to promote their own political agendas and appointed them as state functionaries.³ A detailed account of the condition of Sikhs in Afghanistan, written by an Afghan-Sikh in Gurumukhi suggest that the founder of Sikh religion Guru Nanak visited Afghanistan many times between 1521 and 1540, preached his faith and converted some Hindus.⁴ It is believed that Guru Nanak visited the Chishma Sahib Gurudwara (which is still present in Jalalabad) on his way back from Iraq and Saudi Arabia to India and therefore is a significant pilgrimage place for the members of the community.⁵ To establish the importance of the place an Afghan Sikh explained 'Chishma Sahib for Sikhs is as important as Mecca for Muslims and Jerusalem for Christians'.⁶ Later, under the leadership of Ranjit Singh, Sikhs expanded their influence westward.

During the British rule in India, trade between Afghanistan and British-India increased and the traders and merchants were primarily from two communities: the Sindhi Shikarpuris and Punjabi Khattris.⁷ The latter usually settled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and areas beyond the Durand Line (the line that separated Afghanistan and Pakistan) 'occupied a specific niche: given their high levels of literacy in Farsi, they made their living as merchants, traders, scribes and administrators'.⁸ The partition of India in 1947 resulted in a bloody sectarian conflict between Hindus and Muslims. During that time, many Sikhs and Hindus who were settled in KPK had the option to stay back as they shared good relations with their Pashtun neighbors. However Islam and rising Pakistani nationalism posed a threat to their way of life and caused some of them to find safe heavens in Afghanistan apart from India.

The status of Hindus and Sikhs improved substantially in the post World War II period and the political stability enabled them to expand their

businesses; many ventured into commercial and banking sectors to the extent that at one point Hindus and Sikhs were in charge of most banking activities in the country and a number of them operated currency exchange centers in major cities that facilitated the operation of informal value transfer systems known as *Hawala*.⁹ The members of these communities were primarily involved in businesses and some people attribute this to the fact that they were not allowed to own land in the country. In the 1940s, Hindus and Sikhs received an opportunity to play a role in country's political life. Although they were drafted in the army as regular soldiers, they were not allowed to attend military schools or become army officers. In the 1969 Parliamentary elections, Ji Singh Fani succeeded in winning a seat in parliament but he failed to use his position and authority to advance the cause of his community.¹⁰ When Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud came to power overthrowing the monarchy and Afghanistan was declared a republic, the status of Hindus and Sikhs remained unchanged. In the later phase during Dr. Najibullah's Presidentship, to gain support of these communities he nominated two representatives to the parliament. Till the fall of pro-Soviet Communist regime their overall conditions were relatively good.

There is hardly any reliable demographic data on Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, however it is suggested that in early 1970s, the number of Hindu nationals was estimated to be 25,000-30,000 and that of Sikhs to be 15,000; however there are unverified claims that the number of Hindus in 1990 was around 200,000 and those of Sikhs was 80,000 with some 30,000 residing in Kabul.¹¹ They primarily resided in Kabul, Logar, Parwan, Qandahar, Qunduz, Nangarhar, Laghman, Ghazni, Helmand and Paktiya provinces and spoke the language of communities settled there.¹²

Hindus and Sikhs bear physical resemblance to Pashtun residents and largely adapted to local culture; however, Sikhs can easily be distinguished from others in outward appearance. Although Hindus and Sikhs have been in the country from a long time and have played a significant role in the social and cultural life of the country, local Muslim communities still regarded them as aliens and associated them with Hindus and Sikhs in Hindustan- India proper. Harbhajan Singh, an Afghan Sikh currently living in India recollected 'although situations of Sikhs and Hindus were much better before the Soviet withdrawal, however we were never whole heartedly accepted by the local Muslim community in Afghanistan...considering our forefathers lived and died in that land and we considered ourselves Afghans first, it was a bitter reality that one had to accept.'¹³ Islam recognizes non-Muslims, Jews and Christians as 'People of Book' and treats them favorably; however it discriminated against Hindus and Sikhs and does not recognize their scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Sri Guru Granth* also known as *Adi Granth* to be as divine as the Torah or Bible.¹⁴ This view of Islam is believed to have formed the very basis of public perception with regard to Hindus and Sikh residents of the country, at least for the conservative section of the Afghan population. The educated and enlightened Afghans treated them with respect and attributed the terms *Lala Hindu* or *Lala Jan* to address them. One resident of Khair Khana locality in Kabul mentioned, 'Since my childhood I used to go to

the shops of *Lala Hindus* to buy clothes, groceries and other things...my father used to call them by that name so we did the same. We were not aware of the difference between Hindus and Sikhs...for us they all were *Lala Hindus* and still are.¹⁵The popular perception about their association with India was mostly seen in a positive light. Most Afghans have been fans of Indian movies and they shared a positive and romantic notion about India and Indians based on the films they watched in their theatre and televisions.

Yet, there were also people who treated them as second-class citizens. Their contempt was so pervasive that even poor men who in the past worked as gardeners or maids in affluent Hindus families would consider themselves superior to their masters. Most Afghans did not attend their religious festivities or religious centers and severely objected to marital linkages with them. Although there are instances of Afghan men getting married to Hindu women as they often embraced Islam in order for the marriage to be sanctified and legalized, however it was not acceptable for men of the minority community to marry Muslim women. Hindus and Sikhs despite years of unceasing harassment and persecution did not abandon Afghanistan as they considering it their rightful home.

The Conflict Phase and Forced Migration

After the Soviet-backed government collapsed and Islamic fundamentalists seized power in 1992, the relative peace and fragile stability disappeared as conflicting *Muhabideen* factions initiated brutal war for control of the country. These groups earlier had fought *Jihad* against the Soviet occupation to free their country from the infidels with generous financial and artillery support from external powers. Unable to agree on power-sharing these groups fought one another- a war that recognized no rules of engagement as combatants took men and women of rival groups and innocent civilians hostages, raping, molesting and mutilating their bodies. As the ideal of ethnic cleansing raged throughout the country, the situation of the non-Muslim minority became extremely grave.

At the initial phase they did not think of leaving Afghanistan because they felt they would not be attacked as they maintained their neutrality and were not part of any warring factions. The period that followed subsequently proved the fatality of that decision. Since they were relatively prosperous because of their trades and businesses, they became prey for kidnappings for ransom. Warlords brutalized them, looted them and attacked their wives and daughters and forced them to convert to Islam. However this is not to suggest that these experiences were exclusive to the minority population. The civil war period saw internal power struggle among the *Mujahideen* factions and they brutalized members of the opponent factions. Common Afghans irrespective of their ethnic and religious background experienced these atrocities on a day-to-day basis and have been victims of war in Afghanistan. The bombs and missiles did not distinguish between people. Perhaps for the minorities, the political repression and religious bigotry touched a different level altogether. During this phase, Hindus and Sikhs were disliked even by some of their

erstwhile 'friendly' neighbours.¹⁶ The initial period after the Soviet withdrawal saw return of Afghans who had fled the Soviets on one hand and flight of Soviet sympathizers out of Afghanistan on the other. While many Afghan refugees (about 1.2 million) were encouraged to return following repatriation, others fled from the growing violence throughout the country.¹⁷

The Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan also started fleeing the country leaving their ruined properties in the custody of their relatives or friends in order to escape reprisals by Islamic warriors. Hindu and Sikh religious centers, *Mandirs* and *Gurudwaras*, were either destroyed during the civil strife or were seized by powerful and armed men. An interesting documentary titled 'Mission Afghanistan' depicts the bullet ridden walls of the Gurudwara Guru Har Rai Sahib, in the Shobazar region of Kabul. Sri Ravinder Singh stated, 'When civil war broke out in 1992, the special forces of Ahmad Shah Massoud (Northern Alliance) occupied the places of worship to fight against the militia of Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum to capture the Balesar hills. The building was used as a barricade, which is why missiles were fired targeting the Gurudwara.'¹⁸ This place of worship was regularly bombarded in the battles between *Hizb-i-Islami*¹⁹ and *Jumbish-e-Millî*²⁰ factions till the Taliban took over. During the conflict, the basement of the Sikh Shrine was used for keeping dead bodies; after the Taliban came to power they buried them.

Continued raids on private houses by criminals and Islamic warriors forced Hindus and Sikhs to leave their homes and seek shelter in their religious places believing that they will be safe there amongst community members. Islamic fundamentalists reacted negatively on these people after the news of the demolition of Babri mosque in Ayodhya, India in December 1992 reached Kabul. In retaliation to what happened in India, the religious centers of Afghan-Hindus and Sikhs were destroyed and their contents were looted. In Karta-i-Parwan armed militias entered Hindu and Sikh residences and after molesting the family they forcibly circumcised male members of the family.²¹

When *Taliban* seized power in Kabul in 1996 they adopted a more repressive policy in order to build their version of an Islamic society based on their interpretation of Islam and Quranic injunctions and brutalized those who violated their rulings. To marginalize the minority community even further the people were urged to avoid buying items from their shops. Efforts were made to convert them to Islam. The Taliban ordered male members of the communities to wear yellow tags to separate them from Muslim population and also ordered them to mark their houses to identify them as Hindu residences.²² Although international community condemned the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas, they failed to raise their voices in favour of the protection of the religious minorities against rising Islamic orthodoxy. There are no reliable data on the number of religious minorities however it is estimated that at present 3000 Sikhs and little over 100 Hindus live in Afghanistan.²³ 'The handful of families who have stayed back in Afghanistan have done that not out of choice...but because they could not bear the expenditure of migration process...given an option most of us stuck here would leave at once' said an Afghan Hindu gentleman, who came to offer prayer at the *Asamai mandir*.²⁴ To sum up, it can be said that the systematic

targeting of non-Muslim minorities, did not leave them with much options but to leave their country. Many Hindus and Sikhs found incentives to seek asylum in India, born of the ethnic and religious similarities to a segment of the Indian population.

The Resettlement Phase: Conflict Displaced Afghan Population in India

India is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol, and the Indian government does not officially recognize the Afghan community as 'refugees'. In fact, India lacks overarching legislation to deal with matters pertaining to refugees and asylum seekers in general. This leaves the government to deal with refugees on an *ad hoc* basis.²⁵ It is a challenge to make an exact estimation about the number of Afghan refugees living in India as the number will largely depend on the definition of 'refugee' being utilized. According to UNHCR New Delhi, India hosts 10,442 refugees and 1,107 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, mostly concentrated in and around the capital city.²⁶ UNHCR statistics and other reports have also continually confirmed that an overwhelming majority of Afghan refugees in India are predominantly from Sikh and Hindu communities of Afghanistan.²⁷

Both Julie Baujard²⁸ and Manik Cakraborty²⁹ suggest that a distinction should be made between the first Afghan refugees to arrive to India and Afghans who arrived after 1991. The former were not necessarily Hindus and Sikhs; they also included Muslims from the middle and upper middle classes who had valid travel documents and were considering India as a temporary host country while aiming for asylum in the West. The latter by contrast, were largely Hindus and Sikhs. This indicates that Afghans of Hindu and Sikh faiths could not have constituted a majority in the initial years of exile, however a shift in the trend was noticed in the early 1990s. This idea was shared by India based Afghanistan specialists, Gulshan Sachdeva and Ambrish Dhaka, who distinguish between refugees belonging to Afghan political elite and the bulk of Afghan refugees in India made up of Sikhs and Hindus.³⁰ Those under UNHCR protection have access to ID cards recognizing them as 'refugees'.³¹ UNHCR certificates enable refugees to acquire temporary residence permits from the Indian authorities and therefore, a right to stay in the country. They also entitle certificate holders to a subsistence allowance and certain other basic services, such as healthcare, education and assistance in the naturalization process. This in a way, puts refugees recognized by UNHCR in a much better situation than refugees who are not recognized. However, residence is only the beginning of the story. Even legal refugees are not allowed to work in India and therefore find it hard to make a living. They can either depend on the scarce and limited financial support from UNHCR and /or, like those who have no legal status in India, work in the country's parallel economy.³² Most of the poor refugees working in informal sector have to take recourse to a survival strategy which included bribing the police and bureaucrats.³³ Needless to say, both recognized as well as unrecognized Afghan 'refugees' look forward to a change of situation.

For communities which are protected under the UNHCR mandate, refugee status determination is largely carried out by the UNHCR and is then subsequently backed by the Indian government. Given that the UNHCR recognition of refugee status is the only legal protection a refugee may have against deportation or arbitrary detention, the scope and reach of the UNHCR to effectively protect people has been very limited.³⁴ Literature on the subject attributes the UNHCR's inadequate scope to a lack of sufficient funding for their India office and to the limited awareness and resources of asylum seekers that would allow them to avail themselves of existing facilities. Despite India's acceptance of the principle of *non-refoulement*, those fleeing persecution within Indian borders continue to be treated like economic migrants, rather than as a special category of persons in need of international protection.

A recently published research paper dealing with 'Statelessness' issues in terms of ex-Gazans in Jordan and Afghans in India, argued in favour of widening the statelessness regime for providing international protection to the for communities who lack effective nationality.³⁵ In theory, Afghans Sikhs and Hindus do have a nationality – the Afghan nationality. However, history has established that these communities do not enjoy effective nationality, or protection, in Afghanistan. In India- the country where they took refuge, the path to gaining full protection is only possible through citizenship. Foreigners lack access to basic rights (such as the right to an education, the right to public employment, protection against arrest and detention in certain cases), which Indian citizens are entitled to by virtue of the Indian Constitution.³⁶ The lack of effective Afghan or Indian nationality, coupled with the cultural and ethnic ties that led Afghan Sikhs and Hindus to seek refuge in India, may lead one to assume that naturalization would be the best solution. However, due to complicated bureaucratic processes and bottlenecks, the naturalization solution can only be realized in the long-term. To make things worse, under Indian Law, one has to wait for 12 years (increased from 10 years) to become an Indian citizen. Establishing lawful residence can prove difficult for persons who entered India irregularly, especially those fleeing persecution. Asylum seekers without proper documentation have only one option for proving their residence – registration and subsequent refugee recognition by the UNHCR. Those unable to gain protection via UNHCR are extremely vulnerable, as neither the host country nor the international community demonstrate accountability. Thereby the paper states that due to lack of capacity or willingness, both the home and the host countries have failed in their moral (and arguably legal) obligation to defend the rights of persecuted and oppressed communities, rendering them *de facto* stateless.

The religious minorities of Afghanistan had lost their property, money, business- almost everything and for most of them, going back to Afghanistan is not even an option. Many of them feel they have been victims of not only high degree of *ad hocism* and but also insensitive approach on part of the Indian Government. An Afghan refugee interviewed in India stated, 'Indian Government has invested 2 billion dollars in the reconstruction work of Afghanistan. They talk about 'people to people' contact between Afghans

and Indians...which is all great! But what about the plight of Afghans living within Indian territory? Indian Government is least bothered, so is the Afghan Government.³⁷

For most of these Afghan nationals who were forced to flee Afghanistan, India was a natural choice and they had lot of expectations from the Indian Government. Jathedar Charan Singh Nagpal of Gurudwara Arjun Devji, Mahavir Nagar spoke about how Pakistan offered them the option to stay there. Kulwant Singh who runs a chemist shop in Udipi complex in Munirka stated 'My father came to India in 1987 due to apprehensions about conflict escalation. We remained here on 'stay visa', since then. It was two years back that we received citizenship and finally my family became Indian after long wait of 18 years.'³⁸ Though the Afghan refugees do not face many problems in their day to day life but most of them live under the constant fear of being deported back to Afghanistan as their Stay Visa is for a short period of one year. Before they get a year's extension it is time again for them to renew their 'Stay Visa'- So they are constantly on tenterhooks!³⁹

Compared to their Pakistani and Iranian counterparts, Afghan refugees in India seem to be less organized and united. Although there are instances of mobilization attempt among Afghan refugees while *Taliban* were rampaging through Afghanistan, requesting the international community not to hold any dialogue with them. Also a sit in protest was held around the same time in front of the New Delhi Bureau of UNHCR, denouncing the refugee situation in India, in particular, the mass denial of residence permits by India since the beginning of 1999 and lack of assistance provide by UNHCR for refugees seeking resettlement abroad.⁴⁰ Even since the fall of *Taliban* regime in Kabul and the involvement of international community since 2001, no one can recall any Afghan mobilization in India. Interviews with the Afghan refugees of minority communities revealed that they are skeptical about protesting against the government firstly because they feel that might reduce their chances of gaining citizenship, secondly some argued that they are too tied up in their day to day struggle for survival in India and have not thought about these issues.⁴¹

The problematic option for India is integration, as Afghan refugees would have to be kept in the country, albeit under different status either as permanent resident or as citizens. For a long time India did not indicate any intention of integrating the bulk of Afghan refugees into Indian society, although things are changing.⁴² The NDA Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has granted citizenship to nearly 4,300 Hindus and Sikh refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan in its one year of being in power, nearly four times the number granted to such persons in the preceding years under UPA-II.⁴³ This development has generated some hope for several other Afghan refugees from the minority communities of Afghanistan. There is no denying of the fact that while on one hand such news has generated optimism and enthusiasm for one group of Afghan refugees, it has also increased the concern of refugees of Muslim faith. These *ad hoc* policies adopted by governments are by no means substitute for a structured refugee legislation, which has been missing in India.

Conclusion

The Afghan 'refugees' in India are victims of geo-political and historical circumstances in Afghanistan where the big powers are playing their game, like Soviet intervention, CIA sponsored and Pakistan backed *Taliban* movement and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. While Afghans in general have suffered, the condition of religious minorities have been heart wrenching. They suffered near fatal blow when Islamic fundamentalists seized power and many were forced to leave the country to escape religio-political repression. The plight of the Hindus and Sikhs who stayed back are unlikely to improve as long as Islamic fundamentalists merely re-label themselves as liberals and remain in position of authority in the state apparatus and continue to harass non-Muslim citizens.

This article focused on the situation of some of the members of those two communities who took refuge in India- a country that officially does not recognize them as 'refugees'. Therefore it is not responsible to offer protections and services, which the international community thinks a 'refugee' is entitled to, considering he did not choose but forced to leave his country of origin. The recent enthusiasm surrounding the Indian Government's granting of citizenship to some members of religious minorities of Afghanistan, do not take away from the fact that Afghans in India continue to live in a sorry state. Post 2014- a significant population flow from Afghanistan is currently underway and a good number of them are seeking refuge in India. Talking about the plight of Afghans in Afghanistan would hardly make little sense if Indian government chooses to ignore the plight of Afghans currently inside India. To conclude, it will be fair to say that so far, both home and host countries have failed in their legal and arguably moral obligation to protect the oppressed religious minorities of Afghanistan.

Notes

¹Roger Ballard, 'The History and Current Position of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh Population'. *Centre for Applied South Asian Studies*, 2011. Available at <http://www.casas.org.uk/papers/pdfpapers/afghansikhs.pdf>.

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¹² Hafizullah Emadi, 'Minorities and Marginality: Pertinacity of Hindus and Sikhs in a repressive environment in Afghanistan'. pp.310

¹³ Harbhajan Singh, (member of Afghan Sikh community in India, who fled Afghanistan in 1992) in discussion with Anwesha Ghosh, 17th October 2014, Gurudwara Greater Kailash 2, New Delhi.

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¹⁵ Abdullah Sapi, (neighbor of Sikhs and Hindus in the Khair Khana locality of Kabul) in discussion with Anwesha Ghosh, 2nd April 2012, Kabul, Afghanistan.

¹⁶ Ashish Bose, 'Afghan Refugees in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39, 2004, pp. 4698-4701.

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²⁰ *Jumbish-e-Milli* (Islamic Movement of Afghanistan) was another Islamist organization formed under the Uzbek leader Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum. They also fought the communist regime and after the Soviet withdrawal, this faction among various others played major part in the internal conflict.

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²² Hafizullah Emadi, 'Minorities and Marginality: Pertinacity of Hindus and Sikhs in a repressive environment in Afghanistan', pp.316.

²³ Roger Ballard, 'The History and Current Position of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh Population'.

²⁴ A Hindu resident of Kabul, unwilling to disclose his identity in discussion with Anwesha Ghosh, April 2012, Asamai Temple, Kabul, Afghanistan.

²⁵ Miriam Aced and Anwesha Ghosh, 'Statelessness Protections as a Remedy for Protection Gaps in Jordan and India', *Refugee Review Journal*, 2, 2005, pp.59-76.

²⁶ Shuchita Mehta (Senior Communication / Public Information Assistant, UNHCR India) in discussion with Anwesha Ghosh, October 2014.

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²⁹ Manik Chakraborty, *Human Rights and Refugees: Problems, Laws and Practices*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publisher, 1998.

³⁰ Anne-Sophie Bentz, 'Afghan Refugees in Indo-Afghan Relation', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26, 2013, pp.374-391.

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³² Anne-Sophie Bentz, 'Afghan Refugees in Indo-Afghan Relation', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26, 2013, pp. 374-391.

³³ Ashish Bose, 'Afghan Refugees in India'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39, 2004, pp. 4698-4701.

³⁴ Miriam Aced and Anwesha Ghosh, 'Statelessness Protections as a Remedy for Protection Gaps in Jordan and India'.

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³⁶ *Constitution (consolidated up to 2007)* [India], 26 January 1950, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5e20.html>.

³⁷ An Afghan-Sikhs Living in India since 1996, unwilling to disclose his identity in discussion with Anwesha Ghosh, November 2014, New Delhi, India.

³⁸ Mondira Dutta and P.K Sharma, 'Displaced Population from Afghanistan: A Case Study of Delhi', in Mondira Dutta (Ed.) *Emerging Afghanistan in the Third Millenium*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2009, pp. 52-73.

³⁹ Pramod Kumar Sharma, 'Status of Afghan Refugees in Delhi' (MPhil. Dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2007).

⁴⁰ Ravi Nair, *Abandoned and Betrayed: Afghan Refugees under UNHCR Protection in New Delhi*, New Delhi: Impulsive creations, 1999.

⁴¹ Interviews conducted by the author with the members of Afghan Sikh and Afghan Hindu communities living in various parts of New Delhi. October- December, 2014.

⁴² Anne-Sophie Bentz, 'Afghan Refugees in Indo-Afghan Relation', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26, 2013, pp.374-391.

⁴³ Jayant Sriram, '4,300 Hindu, Sikhs Refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan Get Citizenship', *The Hindu*, June 15, 2015.

Report-I

International Workshop on Gender, Development, Resistance, 7 to 8 June 2015, University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland: A Report

By

Sreya Sen*

The Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland organized an International Workshop on *Gender, Development, Resistance* on the 7th and 8th of June 2015. Funded by the Finnish Academy of Social Sciences, the workshop brought together activists, practitioners and academics dedicated to the research, analysis and discussion of upcoming issues in the area of development and gender studies. This workshop was also a follow up of the Ninth Feminist Research Conference on *Sex and Capital* sponsored by ATGENDER, a European organization for gender documentation and research, which took place at the University of Lapland, from 3rd to 6th June 2015. Altogether, there were 21 papers presented at the workshop, over eight panels and over a span of two days, with a keynote lecture by Dr. Paula Banerjee of the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, Calcutta University and a concluding talk by workshop host and post-doctoral researcher at the University of Lapland, Dr. Tiina Seppala.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Paula Banerjee explained how the development paradigm favored by much of the post colonial world has resulted in massive displacement, since the cost of development is not borne equally by all sections of society. The most vulnerable of the population such as the indigenous people, minorities etc she argued, bear the cost of development while the more endowed enjoy the fruits of development. After providing an overview of women's resistance to dams, mining and other development projects in Northeastern India and in the Indian states of Orissa

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Refugee Watch, 45, June 2015

and West Bengal in her presentation on '*We are Made of the Same Earth We are Fighting For*' - *Development Induced Displacement and Resistance in India*, Dr Banerjee concluded that women occupied a significant portion of the resisting population owing to a concern for their children and future generations, their training in Satyagraha and their longstanding struggle against state, patriarchy and capital.

The first session of the workshop chaired by Dr. Tiina Seppala, began with Elina Onias (University of Helsinki) exploring contemporary forms of feminist resistance and protests through varied responses to Femen, an activist group in Tunisia in 2013 in her presentation on *Visual Interruptions? Femen in Tunisia: 'Came. Stripped. Conquered', Conquered What?* She highlighted the interesting aspects of the Tunisian Femen movement, explaining how it captured several contemporary tensions with regard to changing fundamentalisms, public sexualisation, politicized embodiment and shape, cultural changes, generational clashes, trans-national movements, youth and political engagements and social change. Anita Kynsilehto (Uppsala University) followed by elaborating in her talk on *Corporeally Contesting Border Practices: Hubs of Transit Migration as Gendered Sites* on the concept of transit migration, explaining how its routes ran along different hubs. She based her lecture on ethnographic insights gained with people who are characterized in official discourses as asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, examining corporeal forms of resistance and highlighting the potential of mobile persons to disturb administrative power which regulates and prevents irregular global mobility by adopting a policy of containment. Eija Ranta (University of Helsinki) then entered into a discussion through her paper '*There is Patriarchy Fighting Back Feminism*': *Negotiating Gendered Political Spaces and Power in Kenya* of the aspirations and experiences of women in Kenya who venture into political forums and national decision making, focusing both on women who are still struggling to enter the political arena and women who have succeeded in entering parliament. Her presentation described and analyzed the production and reproduction of active struggles faced by women to overcome structural barriers imposed by male strategies of controlling and governing political spaces, arguing how issues such as gender, ethnicity, age and class intersect in the course of these struggles. She concluded that it is through their resistance, struggle and action for social change that these Kenyan women practice and define politics as a struggle over meanings and resources.

The afternoon session was chaired by Dr. Paula Banerjee and it opened with Sreya Sen (Calcutta University) analyzing the impact of river erosion induced displacement on the lives of women in Malda, West Bengal (India) and Khulna, Bangladesh in her paper on *Gender, Displacement and Resistance in South Asia: The Case of Women Uprooted by River Erosion in West Bengal and Bangladesh c. 2000 AD–2010 AD*. The focus of her discussion was to see how this phenomenon of displacement triggers resistance among the women displaced, instead of simply making them victims of the process. She concluded that women are indeed active agents of social change, and that state authorities need to take on a gender sensitive approach when rehabilitating the displaced, in order to empower these already resilient women. By looking at

three case studies from Hyderabad, India, Dr Nanda Kishore (Manipal University) ventured into a discussion in his presentation on *Displacement and Vulnerability Risks-Unheard Voices of the Displaced* about livelihoods that have been disrupted as a consequence of development induced displacement, emphasizing the gendered nature of development politics, especially with regard to decision making. He argued how the plethora of development has succeeded in superseding social welfare in India through coercive displacement and resettlement, emphasizing the increasing abuse of displacement laws in the name of public purpose, which in his opinion poses a huge threat to the Indian democratic system. Thereafter, Neetu Pokharel (Nepal Institute of Peace) proceeded in her presentation on *Women Empowerment in Nepal: Rhetoric or Reality?* to explore how the empowerment of women has been narrowly understood and defined in Nepal by identifying lacunae in policies and practices for this purpose. Her paper also highlighted the commitment of the government and civil society towards enhancing gender equality and empowerment as well as the achievements of women in areas of education, health, poverty reduction and political participation. This was followed with a talk by Som Prasad Niroula (Nepal Institute of Peace) who spoke of complexities in women's rights movements in Nepal by sharing his interviews with key women's rights activists in the country in his paper on, *Struggle for Rights and Justice: A Case Study of Nepal*. He discussed in details, the fragmentations in these movements, with particular reference to their failure in addressing the aspirations of marginalized and vulnerable women.

The concluding session of Workshop Day One was chaired by Dr. Tiina Seppala of the University of Lapland and started with Roopshree Joshi (Nepal) sharing findings from her research on women's access to citizenship by comparing how Nepalese women married to Tibetan men and single Nepalese mothers were incapable of transferring citizenship rights to their children in her talk on *The Right to Citizenship? The Case of Tibetan and Bhutanese Refugees Living in Nepal*. She also argued about how their right to identity had been violated in a number of instances, such as denial of access to travel documents and driving licenses, both of which facilitate movement. Her talk was followed by a presentation from Bhagavati Adhikari (Nepal Mahila Ekata Samaj) who offered some personal perspectives on gender from her experience in working with slum communities in Nepal in her paper on *Perspectives on Gender from within the Slum Communities in Nepal*.

Session one of Workshop Day Two was chaired by Dr. Nanda Kishor. It began with Signe Arnfred (Roskilde University) discussing women's rituals in Northern Mozambique in her talk on *Kinds of Knowledge and Spaces of Resistance: Women's Rituals in Northern Mozambique* with a focus on spaces of resistance and forms of knowledge, drawing inspiration from the notion of material knowledge. She looked at how sexual education in particular, serves as a breeding ground for women's resistance and resilience and how it also constitutes a potential point of departure for alternative politics and conceptualizations of gender. Her discussion was followed by a presentation on *The Nyéléni Effect: Alliances for Food Sovereignty and the Remaking of Feminism in the World March of Women* by Janet Conway (Brock University, Toronto) who

explored the myriad and inter connected transformations in feminism such as the forging of alliances with non feminist others around common struggles, by studying the World March of Women and its politics of allegiance surrounding food sovereignty in the last decade. She remarked how the World March of Women which is the largest transnational feminist movement in the world, active in every continent and constituted by several local women's groups, is not only one that privileges the agency of working class and poor women, anchored in place based survival strategies but that it is also an enactment of a 'politics of global ambition.'¹ Thereafter, Leonie Ansems de Vries (Queen Mary University, London) showcased the relation between resistance and governance in the context of refugee subjectivities in Malaysia in her talk on *Politics of (In) visibility: Governance-Resistance and the Constitution of Refugee Subjectivities in Malaysia* by examining resistance practices and the context in which these emerge, thus moving away from the notion that refugees are mere victims who are subjected to control and violence. Paola Vizcaino Suarez and Rocio Serrano Barquin (Mexico) shared preliminary results of their ongoing research which seeks to assess empowerment processes among women artisans who are vendors and producers of ethnic clay crafts in a central Mexican destination for cultural tourism in their presentation on *Experiences of Empowerment and Disempowerment of Women Artisans in a Small Cultural Tourism Destination* (Metepc, México). They argued that the aim of this research was to put the experiences of these women at the forefront of the present debate on tourism development in the town of Metepc in Mexico. This was followed by a presentation on *Beyond Eurocentric Imaginary Body* by Carolina Serrano Barquin, Rocio Serrano Barquin and Adelaida Rojas Garcia (Mexico) analyzing the interpretation and assimilation of the body image binary by student athletes from the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. Their study demonstrated how students were capable of characterizing this notion through their own visions and criteria thus displaying an evidence of the influence of foreign models that are associated with beauty, egotism and aesthetics all of which are rooted in a Eurocentric idea of the body.

The afternoon session was chaired by Dr. Tiina Seppala. It took off with Wendy Guns (Amsterdam) investigating in her paper, *Gender or Ideas?* whether women friendly international norms could be established only if women were made to be a part of the law making process, concluding that while gender plays a crucial role in this regard, so do the ideas of the women who are involved. This was followed by a presentation on *Hybridity and Resistance? Search for Healing in a Charismatic Church Community in Mbeya, Tanzania from Lotta Gammelín* (Lund University) who spoke of how spirituality and healing is constructed and gendered in a Mybeyan community in Southern Tanzania. She argued that the spirit world was strongly gendered and sexualized as are healing practices. By attending sessions on spirituality and healing, women end up seeking refuge from oppressing circumstances and powers of a misogynistic nature. Her paper thus raised the question whether women's religious narratives and experiences built on power, fertility and sexuality, could be explained in a post-colonial setting. Enni Mikkonen

(University of Lapland) then addressed the changing social position of women in rural communities of Nepal in her paper on *Tensions of Transition in Women's Social Position in Nepalese Rural Communities*, scrutinizing the external and internal forces that drive this transition. Heidi Alatalo (University of Lapland) engaged in her talk on *Conceptions for African Future Development: Constructing East-African Agencies of Excluded for Inclusion through Postcolonial Theory* in an examination of African conceptions of development via their own discourses by exploring two different social interest groups in three East African countries – Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. Her reasons for selecting these countries were based on the fact that they are all partners with Finland in the area of bilateral development cooperation. The goal of her research is to offer a new understanding of future development in Africa. Through an argument of how rationalities and technologies of the modern nation state find reproduction in contemporary times by individualizing social ills and pathologizing the poor, Sara Motta (University of New Castle, Australia) then explained in her discussion on *Australia's Body Politic: The Negation and Denial of the Raced/Gendered 'Other'* the legitimization of continued and increasing interventions to remove children from refugee, poor white and indigenous families. Her paper outlined all the key elements that are emerging as foundational in contemporary decolonizing politics as well as re-articulation of political subjectivity of the damne, such as the emergency of practical theorizations from experiences of those with colonial differences and foregrounding of democratic practices that are embedded in a dialogic diversity as opposed to abstract monological universalism which is associated with coloniality or modernity.

The concluding session of the workshop was chaired by Dr. Paula Banerjee and began with Afroja Khanam (University of Lapland) discussing in her paper on *A Gendered Perspective on Climate Change Induced Migration in Bangladesh: Findings from Char Batia, Bogra* the extent to which women's lives have been affected as a consequence of multiple migrations due to river erosion in Char Batia, located in the Bogra district of Bangladesh, stressing on the dire impact this displacement has had on women's social status, within the family and community, their livelihoods and their security. The second and last speaker of the session was Dr. Tiina Seppla who critiqued resistance and autonomy in South Asia in her paper on *Autonomy and Critique: Feminization of Resistance in India and Nepal*, highlighting in her talk, the importance of decolonizing forms of feminist solidarity and reflecting on the challenges and potential that it brings in the context of engaged social movement research, through an analysis of ethnographic fieldwork with social movement activists in Kolkata, India and in Kathmandu, Nepal. She argued that taking into account the perspectives of activists could not only broaden and enrich theoretical debates on feminization of resistance in several ways but can also contribute towards concrete efforts in decolonizing political science and feminism in the West, through a transformation of the relationship between political practice and theory, being and knowing.

Notes

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Report-II

Research Workshop on Rohingyas in India: Birth of a Stateless Community, August 13- 14, 2015, Darjeeling: A Report

By

Sucharita Sengupta and Madhura Chakraborty*

The Calcutta Research Group, with support from the Taft Foundation, organized the final research workshop titled *Rohingyas in India: Birth of a Stateless Community* on 13-14 August 2015 in Darjeeling. This workshop was the result of CRG-Taft Foundation's work on the Rohingyas in India and Bangladesh and is a continuation of CRG's work on Statelessness. The First Research Workshop on the Rohingyas was undertaken as part of Interrogating Forced Migration Studies supported by the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and the Taft Foundation.

The research workshop opened with a roundtable discussion on the *Migrants in the North East*. The participants were Amar Singh Rai (Chairperson, Darjeeling Municipality), Roshan Rai (DLR Prerna, Darjeeling) and Anup Sekhar Chakraborty (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling). The chair of the Session was Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury (Vice-Chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata) who introduced the purpose of the workshop briefly to the audience before introducing the panelists to the floor.

Amar Singh Rai was the first speaker of the day and he started by the question: who should be blamed for the plight of the Rohingyas? He also pointed out the difficulties of distinguishing a 'refugee' and a 'son of the soil' in the context of Darjeeling. For instance, people who have been raised for generations there are also considered as immigrants at times. Gorkha identity is threatened because of migration into the hill towns. The perception of

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Refugee Watch, 45, June 2015.

migrants as outsiders threatening the culture and livelihoods of the local population often leads to unjustifiable violence against them.

Roshan Rai said that people from India's North East were treated as outsiders in India because of racial reasons. People from India's North East were repeatedly questioned about their identity which led to a feeling of great insecurity among those living outside the north east.

Anup Sekhar Chakraborty reflected on the meaning of location within the north east and who was treated as a local and who was treated as an outsider. He spoke about the trend of domestic outsourcing in Darjeeling, especially in context of men, which he termed as a process of 'male outsourcing'. He also noted the trend among north eastern students to go outside the region to pursue higher education.

A lively debate and discussion followed where many aspects of migration and labour migration were brought up and discussed. Ranabir Samaddar (Director, CRG) reflected upon the fact that while empiricism is needed, it is not sufficient to analyze humane conditions.

The next day began with the participants' presentations. The first session was chaired by Nitya Ramakrishnan (Advocate, Supreme Court of India, Delhi). Madhura Chakraborty (Research Assistant, CRG) and Suchismita Majumdar (Honorary Researcher, CRG) presented their findings in this session.

Paula Banerjee (President, CRG and Associate Professor, Calcutta University) was the discussant for both the papers.

Chakraborty's research focused on forced migration of the Rohingya refugees in India and Bangladesh. Her research, based on secondary materials and primary interviews, assessed the situation of Rohingyas in India and Bangladesh vis-à-vis the discourse of securitization in the post 9/11 regime. Her presentation focused on analysis of Indian newspaper reports as well as ethnographic research conducted with Rohingya children in a shelter home in Kolkata.

Majumdar's research was based on more than 100 interviews conducted among the Rohingyas who were incarcerated under the Foreigners Act (1946) in several correctional homes of West Bengal. Her presentation detailed the plight of the inmates and their past history of persecution in Myanmar as well as detailing the routes of migration. Banerjee, while discussing the papers, asked Chakraborty to focus more on media analysis. Banerjee congratulated Majumdar on her thorough ethnographic research and for the data she had amassed but urged her to consult secondary resources more closely for a better understanding of the Rohingya problem. In the question -answers session, more suggestions came up for both the researchers as well as some clarifications that were sought. Majumdar was asked to use cross tabulation to quantify her research and Chakraborty was asked to take into account more newspapers as well.

The second session was chaired by Gaurav Bansal (Consul for Political and Economic Affairs, U.S. Consulate, Kolkata). Sahana Basavapatna (Lawyer, Supreme Court of India) and Priyanca Mathur Velath (Assistant Professor, St. Joseph's College, Bangalore) were the speakers for this session.

Velath's paper, while introducing the broader concept of statelessness, primarily dealt with the Rohingyas who are living in Hyderabad in makeshift camps like the Balapur camp, for a long time now, after being forced to leave Myanmar. Based on interviews, the paper highlighted the plight and the struggle of the Rohingyas in Hyderabad, the legal hassles, the process by which they can receive refugee cards from UNHCR and the daily persecution that they face in Hyderabad. Basavapatna provided a legal analysis of statelessness along with a description of the experiences and rights of the Rohingyas. Her paper was based on interviews that she had conducted in North India- Delhi, Jaipur, Jammu and Mewat. She spoke at length about the legal process that can provide them with long term visas. She highlighted the fact that several Rohingyas were given such visas in India in 2012. The UNHCR had facilitated the process by rendering 'asylum seeker' cards to the Rohingyas based on which they could get the long term visas. Ravi Hemadri (Secretary, Development and Justice Initiative, New Delhi) discussed both these papers. It was suggested that Velath interrogate the narratives of victimization of the Rohingya refugees more critically. Basavapatna was asked to elaborate on the legal definition of statelessness and to discuss to what extent refugee laws could be applicable to stateless persons, especially since a refugee has the right to return, whereas such right becomes problematic in the context of stateless persons. The session was followed by a round of discussions wherein, Nitya Ramakrishnan, Advocate, Supreme Court of India, Delhi, and Ranabir Samaddar, echoed the same concerns as to which refugee laws could be applicable to Stateless persons like the Rohingyas. Ramakrishnan also flagged the need to look into the Citizenship Act and the 1948 Mandate on the Foreigner's Act for a deeper legal analysis.

The following session had Amena Mohsin, (Professor, Department of International Relations, Dhaka University, Dhaka) and Sucharita Sengupta (Research Assistant, Calcutta Research Group) as the speakers. Ravi Hemadri chaired the session and Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury was the discussant for both the papers. Sengupta's research focused on Rohingya migration as part of the perilous irregular maritime migrations to the shores of South East Asian states like Thailand and Malaysia. Tracing the history of 'boat people' and the specificity of the Rohingyas as Asia's new boat people, her paper highlighted the mixed flow of Rohingyas and Bangladeshis from Bangladesh via dangerous sea routes and the possible reasons for such journeys. Despite risks, the accessibility of sea compared to land led to them being trafficked to the Southeast Asian countries, Middle East, and countries like Australia. She argued that the mixed flow has led to further precarity of the Rohingyas in high seas problematising their migration as 'asylum seekers'.

Mohsin started by explaining how the overall scenario unveiled since May 2015 has come as a rude shock to Bangladesh, especially when Bangladesh was in a stage of self appreciation for graduating to a middle income country. In her presentation, she raised the need to problematize the term 'boat people' - meanings that the term encapsulates and if it is correct to describe Bangladeshis as 'boat people'. Human smuggling in South and Southeast Asia is not new and historically the region is known for human

smuggling. The kidnapping of youths of Bangladesh for ransom, she explained, should be also taken into account and the contemporary human trafficking should be understood in a broader context. She also highlighted that the seas or the oceans were never perceived as 'areas' before although they were the main means of navigation. However, the crisis surrounding the notion of 'boat people' does point out the need of situating seas and oceans as geographical areas and not just as 'waters'.

Basu Ray Chaudhury pointed out in his discussion of both the papers that there are different categories of boat people but often they are clubbed together. This difference however needs to be highlighted and, as Mohsin has also argued, the term 'boat people' has to be problematised. Maritime voyages are more vulnerable than land migration which also needs to be explored more. He agreed that the escalation of boat people crisis has led to a re-territorialisation of maritime routes and resources. He urged Sengupta to go deep in the analysis of the Rohingya maritime crisis, including the notion of 'interception' that she had briefly dealt with in her paper. He also flagged the fact that the precarity of Rohingyas as 'boat people' is also an extension of the policy of 'inclusive exclusion' that the Rohingyas have received from the concerned states. In context of the Rohingyas, this precarity is further increased since the boats carried mixed groups of migrants from Bangladesh. Paula Banerjee initiated the discussion by offering an interesting observation. Historically, she said, boats were used to carry slaves. The most hapless were carried in ships, an example of which is the *Komagatamaru* incident. So, what is it about boats that make it most dreaded? She also hinted at the question of race and urged the researchers to explore this as well.

Ranabir Samaddar inquired into the legal basis of interceptions that states have followed, because if it is done beyond territorial waters then it is hostility. Rescue operations need to be questioned as well since more deaths have occurred in the whole process of search and rescue. While the present time is characterized by mixed flows of refugees, laws have increasingly become inadequate to address this.

The fifth session focused on the plight of the Rohingya children with special reference to Bengal. Paromita Chowdhury (Programme Manager - Child Protection, Terres des Hommes, Kolkata) spoke in this session and Anup Sekhar Chakraborty was the chair. Chowdhury pointed out the inhumane policy of the jail authorities in Bengal to separate families which causes severe trauma among children. She also spoke about the structure of the Child Protection Agency and how in spite of being well meaning the authorities end up enacting policies that are not contributing to the well being of the children in anyway. For Rohingya children, initial linguistic difficulties, makes life even harder in shelter homes and the absence of any regular and adequate counseling makes it hard for them to cope with past trauma as well as the trauma of not being with their families.

In the discussion following the presentation, Nitya Ramakrishnan spoke about how this practice of separating the families violate the basic tenets of rights and the constitution and needs to be challenged. Paula Banerjee pointed out that on a research on correctional homes by Calcutta

Research Group, the researchers had encountered the same practice among Bangladeshi women in correctional facilities and this separation of the family was often a permanent one as the child was not released from shelter homes till they reach the age of 18. Ranabir Samaddar argued the legal basis of this separation of families is unconstitutional and illegal.

The concluding session of the day summed up the basic postulates of the Workshop and evoked critical thinking in the complex issue of the Rohingyas as stateless persons. There were two panelists in the session chaired by Ranabir Samaddar. Nitya Ramakrishnan spoke of the need of a proper theoretical and legal framework on the history of the Rohingyas. Forcing people into the condition of statelessness or in a state of protracted refugeehood is worth exploring. The purpose of having a convention on statelessness is to address the conditions that push a subject to statelessness. Therefore there is hardly any point in trying to distinguish or explore whether the Rohingyas are refugees or stateless. Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury concluded the session by suggesting that the law of exclusion in Myanmar in context of the Rohingyas needs a deeper exploration than what has been already addressed in the various sessions of the workshop. He also briefly addressed the history of statelessness of the Rohingyas, referring to the Burmese Citizenship Act of 1982. Lack of documents on the source origin of the Rohingyas has also contributed to the policy of exclusion. A closer look at the Burmese laws, and also Bangladesh's policy towards the Rohingyas is important to contextualize their plight not only in Myanmar or Bangladesh but also in India and other Southeast Asian countries where they have sought refuge.

Book Review

By

Sreya Sen *

Madeleine Reeves (ed.) *Movement, Power and Place in Central Asia and Beyond*, Routledge Third Worlds Two Book Series, Oxford, 2012.

This volume comprises of a collection essays introduced by Madeleine Reeves with the argument that movement is a basic human capability ¹ and a potential target therefore of state intervention. The threat of a certain movement – the migration of Tajik people to un-demarcated and contested territory for instance is countered by another movement, the resettlement of citizens from other parts of Kyrgyzstan in the country by the State. The book is divided into two sections. The first group of essays explores the transformation of place and the workings of power by looking at how movement was prohibited when it was deemed as backward and dangerous, and the deliberate attempts made to resettle population. Charles Shaw examines the political and practical entailments associated with the taming of space during early Soviet rule in Central Asia. His essay talks about the tensions present in the Soviet ambition in controlling its southern border as a place characterized by friendly relations between border officials and the local people while keeping it restricted and inaccessible at the same time. Shaw analyzes archival documents retrieved from reports and secret police circulars of the Central Asian Bureau of the Communist Party. The border is portrayed by Shaw as a distinct political space having its own dynamics and pressures. It is also a place of symbolical importance as this became an area via which the Soviet Union could be assessed both by its neighbors and the rest of the world, particularly its incapacity to territorialize space. Botakoz Kassymbekova uses archival sources from Dushanbe and Moscow to look at how early Soviet rulers attempted to resettle a third of the population of Tajikistan comprising mostly of ethnic Tajiks, at a time when the country's first five year plan was in operation. She argues that this was done primarily to counter the geographical difficulties

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associated with the institutionalization of Soviet control in the mountainous regions. This resettlement policy through its relocation of Tajiks to the lowland areas from the mountainous areas that border Afghanistan also created the notion of a 'Soviet Persian Republic'. The consequence of such resettlement efforts was the solidification and institutionalization of Uzbek and Tajik identity categories, which before 1924 had been of little relevance, and also associated these categories with a specific geographical area. Kassymbekova in her essay also highlights the differential distribution of mobility through material infrastructures. As has been argued by Massey, 'Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differential mobility, some people are more in charge than others, some initiate flows and movement, others don't, some are more on the receiving end of it than others, some are effectively imprisoned by it.'²

Ian Campbell focuses on the Seherbina Expedition which took place from 1896 – 1903. This expedition constituted a preliminary step in organizing the settlement of Russian peasants in the Kazak steppes. While the measurement of physical realities in the steppes was 'ultimately militated against arguments for the superiority of sedentary life ways with respect to economic productivity and civil order' this was put to an end by the reality of mass settlement and political imperatives of the decade of 1900's. Robert Argenbright shows how the 1920 Krasnyi Vostok expedition brought both propaganda and activism to people residing alongside the railway lines that link Turkestan with European Russia. This was an initiative that was highly oriented towards spatial and social transformation. The expedition took place at a time when populations were being terrorized, property was being seized and private gardens were being nationalized followed by widespread famine. What hampered the expedition was the dearth of indigenous cadres, no local knowledge and insufficient supplies.

The second collection of essays places focus on the making of place every day through movement, thus connecting Central Asian materials with the latest theoretical arguments on place and movement. Judith Beyer delves into the oral history and ethnography of rural Talas to highlight socio spatial transformations that took place in the course of the twentieth century in northern Kyrgyzstan emphasizing the way by which these transformations were incorporated into an enactment of place-ness and relatedness on the part of her informants. Judith Beyer looks in particular, at the process of customization via which a number of socio spatial reforms were integrated into 'local geographical understandings'³. Although the reforms directed towards collectivization and sedentarization may be construed to be an aspect of colonial technology, "the villagers altered the imperial landscape which made it possible to perceive of it as theirs" thus incorporating new settlement forms into their daily existence. By paying attention to a number of practices such as the acquisition of illegal passports for the facilitation of cross border movement between Kazakhstan and Mongolia and shrine visitation, Anna Genina and Eva Marie Dubuisson showcase a unique discourse of Kazakness where ancestral rootedness in mobility and land constitute an essential way of expressing identity. The perspective of the reader is thus made to shift from

village and lineage history to homeland and ethno history. Jeanne Feaux de la Croix argues movement to be critical to spatial imaginaries in her study of flowing water and its interpretations in the mountains of Toktogul in Central Kyrgyzstan. She focuses on the hydro electric dam, sacred sites and mountain pastures as these are places where moving water is regarded as socially important. Moving water is powerful in a number of different ways as something which has economic and political potential, as a natural force and as something which can bring about spiritual purification.

The concluding group of essays place attention on long distance migration, and the relationship this shares with the moralization and meanings of home. The Brezhnev era migrations, from the southern republics of the Soviet Union of young women and men to trade in large cities of European Russia such as Moscow is well explored by Jeff Sahadeo. This trade was often unregulated and was tolerated in later periods of Soviet rule, 'to compensate for a sputtering state economy'. Eliza Isabeva looks at contemporary migration for jobs in Alay in southern Kyrgyzstan as well as moral discourses surrounding family absence. She chooses to focus on the relation dynamics between members of families who remain behind and those who have departed, the tension that exists between investing in individual goods and collective goods, the investment and allocation of remittances and the moral evaluation of various forms of migration especially cross border trade. Madeleine Reeves looks at the long term and proximal implications of gender based migration. She highlights the experience of three Sokh women – Mehriqul, Fatimahon and Rukhshona to examine the various ways by which demands to stay put during a period of migration are negotiated by Sokh women, arguing that long distance migration on the part of one household member can necessitate or constrain the mobility of other members of the household. Such migration can enable men to acquire social recognition, habits and skills which their forefathers would have acquired by serving in the Soviet army. For women on the other hand, movement outside the home and within it encodes family honor and even dancing at a family wedding, if unauthorized, maybe deemed out of place.

The essays in this volume represent an attempt to connect short and long distance, classed and gendered, voluntary and involuntary, national and local histories of movement to specific places in the Central Asian region and beyond it. The complex intersections between place, power and movement are explored in contexts such as gendered politics in rural Uzbekistan of staying put at a time of mass migration, the introduction of a civilized sedentarization in the Kazak Steppe through various expeditions, ritual articulation of lineage and language in a present day village of Kyrgyzstan and state led initiatives to resettle population in the early days of Soviet rule in Tajikistan. The essays highlight the need to situate place and movement within the spectrum of power analysis and point out the importance of taking into cognizance the histories of movement when considering place making.

Notes

¹ Madeleine Reeves. 'Introduction: Contested Trajectories and a Dynamic Approach to Place' in Madeleine Reeves(ed.), *Movement, Power and Place in Central Asia and Beyond: Contested Trajectories*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp 1 – 2.

² D Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place' in D. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp 149.

NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Articles submitted for consideration of publication in REFUGEE WATCH should be around 5000 words. Book reviews can be around 1000 words and review articles can be around 2000 words. Articles will have endnotes and not footnotes. Endnotes should be restricted to the minimum. Please refer to www.mcrg.ac.in for a details style sheet. Roundtables can also be proposed for publication. Enquiries about possible submissions are welcome.

For submission of articles and all other matters, correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, Refugee Watch, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, GC-45, First Floor, Sector-III, Salt Lake, Kolkata – 700 106 or paula@mcrg.ac.in. For book review and review-articles correspondence to be addressed to Anita Sengupta, Review Editor, Refugee Watch, at the same address or at anitasengupta@hotmail.com.

Authors will have to submit articles both hard and soft copies (in MS Word). All articles are peer reviewed and it may take 3 to 4 months before a decision is reached on the proposed publication. Contributors will get 2 copies of the journal.

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