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## **“Guests and Aliens”: Re-Configuring New Mobilities in the Eastern Mediterranean After 2011 - with a special focus on Syrian refugees**

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# Mobilities post-2011 in the Eastern Mediterranean: Transformations over Time or sudden Change?

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## I. Discussing social change

- 1 Global Shifts, configuration, reconfiguration,<sup>1</sup> change, rupture, regression, revolution, protest: they are all terms we often hear when trying to interpret what has happened during and after the “Arab Spring.” What we normally see would be very similar to a media report or to a quality paper on political science – looked at on a regional scale, sub-regional scale or as a particular case study –, and normally nationally-framed. In this paper I attempt to look at such transformations through a different lens, even if at the end the issues are still complex and I am obliged to leave a very wide open door for them at the conclusions.
- 2 Firstly I acknowledge problematization by considering a particular cross-cutting theme, mobilities.<sup>2</sup> A very particular topic that has been perceived as peripheral in the post-2011 developments in the MENA region, is, as Geisser and Beaugrand also note in their contribution (2016) while apropos protest movements: “while Arab politics were brought back into the scientific spotlight, refugees, exiles, migrants and their descendants received little attention despite their significant role in the protest movements that toppled dictatorial regimes (in Tunisia and Egypt), contributed to weaken them (Yemen, Bahrain, Syria) or forced them to reform from within (Morocco, Jordan)”.
- 3 Secondly such problematization is constructed by examining a schema which integrates change or permanency simultaneously. Thus, instead of supporting change or supporting non-change (continuity, immobility etc.), I will put forward how continuity and change are interrelated, and multiply as defined in social relations (Scholte 1993). This double force can be very well related to globalization analysis,

giving attention to the complex interplay of continuities and changes, for example, when considering the role of the nation-state, and how we think about the continuity of its old roles. This applies also to its erosion (in the manner that Sassen has described in her most recent literature) when considering the role of territoriality and borders,<sup>3</sup> new inputs (economic privatization, the importance of agency on migration, etc.) old inputs (colonial borders, the legal conception of who is a guest or an alien, using old forms of inclusion-exclusion as well as re-interpreting them: e.g., regional treatment of the foreigner and the asylum seeker), or how such inclusion-exclusion dynamics can be read within a debate on conceptions of hospitality and conceptions of conditionality and temporality.

- 4 Furthermore, to understand such an interplay of changes, I mainly focus on the following instances: (i) the blurring of migration categories, (ii) the spatial challenge of changes vis-à-vis a multi-scaling interpretation: regional concentration, the reinforcement of Fortress Europe and the diversification of mobility routes, the selection of border zones as key research areas (adding that intensified border violence seems to be a key issue in the post-2011 mapping) and the vision of the metropolitan scale as key spaces of cosmopolitan life (e.g. the metropolitan area of Istanbul), (iii) cross-border circulation (concerning humanitarian aid and the humanitarian corridors) and (iv) border clashes, which are posited between state centered notions (*watan-daula*) and postcolonial geopolitical borders, the impact of global economic processes and the particular impact of the “Arab Spring”.
- 5 In this last respect, the Arab Spring has not only had an impact on the increase in already high numbers of refugees (as in the cases of Syria and Yemen, which had civil wars prior to 2011) but also in the exit of migrants especially in the case of Libya, Tunisia and Egypt and some student immigration as part of political activism (as in the case of Tunisia and Egypt on the topic of micro-blogging) (Thiollet 2013: 133). Such an impact is also expressed in a transnational politics of belonging. Geisser and Beaugrand’s contribution provides us with some examples: children of economic migrants, Arab intellectuals in exile, youth who came temporarily to complete their studies in the West, illegal residents and businessmen, all calling for the triumph of democracy. Such a connection between migration and the Arab Spring can also be seen in Europe. For instance, Rohde’s (2016) research concerns jihadists in Hamburg, a phenomenon explained on one hand as part of a youth subculture and on the other as political frustration apropos non-intervention in Syria and the global propaganda<sup>4</sup> displayed by the Islamic State.
- 6 Therefore, through theoretical, empirical and interdisciplinary research, there is a need to open new doors to explore the processes of re-configuration, taking into account the different repositioning of actors in a local, regional and global space. In short, after examining this body of research it is vital to dissect the interscalar context of mobilities after the upheavals of 2011 across North Africa and the Middle East through adoption of a challenging multidisciplinary perspective.

## II. Observing Rights as a Barometer

- 7 As in her classic *Guests and Aliens* (1999), Sassen sought to trace in Europe’s past immigration histories, highlighting the role of the foreigners as rights-bearers; I have aimed at understanding the role of post-2011 mobilities in shaping rights, and as a

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<sup>4</sup>“Guests and Aliens”: Re-Configuring New Mobilities in the Eastern Mediterranean After 2011 - with a special focus on Syrian refugees

barometer for measuring a shift. We have thought of it in the context of social transformation and how migrant categories, migration patterns, borders and cross-border circulation are the main axes of such an analysis. Thus, how do we locate change post-2011? We have found at least five angles to such answer, which do posit new questions:

### Change, rupture, continuity?

- 8 How are “freedom and dignity” slogans really translated into migration changes? Can we trace migrant’s mobilizations from the starting point of the Arab revolts? How have migration patterns changed since the 1990s? Can we really talk about a before and after of mobilities in the aftermath of the “Arab Spring”?

### Contesting borders

- 9 Borders, or more exactly, border zones, in the region are not only spaces of violence – as was shown through the description of Kosmopolous (2014) of the spectacle of institutional pushbacks and the scenarios represented by black masks and anti-riot gear of Greek border guards, but also spaces of contested conditions between migration networks clashing with a wide range of EU border control mechanisms. This conflict highlights the interplay of multiple factors and multiple actors, which make out an interesting field of globalization, connections between the “Arab Spring” and borders.

### New political identities

- 10 Is there a clear connection between the Arab Spring and the reinforcement of Fortress Europe? Is there a clear connection between the Arab Spring and the demand for freedom of mobility and dignity of migrants? Can we discuss a transformation of the political identity of refugees, and more particularly a new claim of a political identity in the way that Denaro (2016), Özden (2014) and Ruiz de Elvira (2016) mention in their own contributions? Ruiz de Elvira (2014) makes us think that we should contemplate policies in a wide sense and to look closely at actors who claim to be apolitical (*gheyr siyasi*) but are de facto political, especially seen in her own case study of the politicization of assistance to Syrian refugees, when she addresses the question how doing charitable work can also mean resistance.

### Placing mobility in the architecture of membership

- 11 Are we witnessing a repoliticization process of migrants as political actors? In that respect Özden (2014) criticizes the image of the refugee as a victim of war (which victimizes and infantilizes them) and defends an image reinforced by their political identity and cultural production, fighting for their visibility and their right to the city of Istanbul.
- 12 Such a question takes us back to how mobilities interfere with enclosure of the EU and to their architectures of membership (described by Sassen’s contribution, 2016), revealing a grey zone between the powerless and the empowered, especially in metropolitan areas and European borders, both spaces of persecution. Enclosure has

been previously thought to be contrary to mobility, but various authors show how agency is constructed by facing different deadlock, impasses and bottlenecks.

- 13 Do we persist with the old question of discrimination of the alien coexisting with “the right to have rights” (see Sassen, Schwarz, this issue), confirmed by the withdrawing of immigrant rights by national legislatures? In such a framework of membership Sassen (this issue) asks herself if the ideological renationalizing of citizenship can coexist with the Europeanizing of membership and complex transnational identity politics. Are the States reinforcing power in deciding who is in and who is out, as well as the possible degrees of the foreigner (alien, guest, citizen, denizen etc.), reinforcing their power to decide who comes in and who is pushed back out across the border? Where is the global left then?

## New circulations

- 14 The Arab Spring impact on mobilities is clearly characterized by a mixture of flows (Thiollet 2013), and thus it is even more pertinent to refer to mobilities. We also have to add to it another impact, as the complex context of the humanitarian crisis which has resulted in complex cross-border corridors of goods, where international and local NGOs play an important role, and a different one from what we have been used to see in other regional crises.

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## NOTES

1. Theorization on the concept of reconfigurations can be also included here. See for example, Rohde's contribution. His approach on the MENA region takes a particular focus on four research fields: history from below (authoritarian rule periods, society and actors, labour conflicts, everyday resistance etc.), re-configurations of cultural memory (remembrance, study of the silent), political transformations and transitional justice (legal context and judiciary role in transitions), and transregional entanglements (by including internal and external factors). Drawing on theoretical resources of transregional comparisons in area studies Rohde searches for adopting political-economy perspectives and critical theory into "critical area studies" in order to help us conceptualizing the contradictory expressions of current globalisation.
2. By using mobilities this work aims to overpass the binary dichotomy of the separated spheres of forced migration (which was used in classic refugee studies) and volunteer migration (with the importance of the idea of agency and autonomy in such a framework). Furthermore, we talk about mobilities not only because we acknowledge a paradigm shift (Sheller and Urry 2006) but

also because general migration categories have become limited in order to encompass a wide spectrum of forms of mobilities.

3. The border focus is mainly understood in a wide relational sense where border processes are connected to and disconnected from both territoriality and sovereignty—meaning nowadays tighter control, enhanced security and developing technological surveillance.

4. Another case he enumerates is of the small northern town of Celle, Germany, which saw clashes between the Yezidi community and Chechen refugees, and between Muslim/non-Muslim refugees in Hamburg, apparently also triggered by events in Syria/Iraq. Furthermore in the case of Berlin and Hamburg, Salehi (2014) describes the situation of Sub-Saharan Africans coming from Libya via Lampedusa, who after having received asylum in Italy found out that their permits in Germany did not allow them to work.

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