

Editorial

Migration within, from and to the Middle East

During the last few decades, the range of key anthropological issues in the Middle East has changed remarkably. Along with relations between tribes and states, nomadism, kinship, ethnic and national conflicts, and tensions caused by oil and water, today's post-9/11 effects and diversifying patterns of migration have increasingly attracted scholarly interest. Although they have entered the field of migration studies surprisingly late, social anthropologists have recently amplified their participation in this booming research area, particularly in transnational studies.

From the late 1960s to the 1980s, migration patterns in the Middle East were characterised by three dominant flows. First, economic differences between rich oil-producing states and their neighbours had caused an export of skilled labour *within* the Arab Middle East, from countries like Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The second pattern of migration – *from* the Middle East – was mainly shaped by post-colonial movements and labour migration to Europe. The independence of Algeria and the recruitment policies of countries such as Germany resulted in skilled and unskilled flows, particularly from Turkey and North Africa to the flourishing European labour markets. The third migration pattern indicated a flow *to* certain parts of the Middle East that, since the 1970s, had been characterised by the feminisation of migration. Thus, women – particularly of Muslim background from South and South-East Asian countries, such as Pakistan and Indonesia – entered the sphere of domestic work in the oil-rich Arab countries.

The region is relevant with regard to questions of migration, not only because of massive inflows, but also due to its impact on global migration patterns. The Middle East oil crisis of 1975 brought the recruitment policies in many of the European receiving countries to a stop. The growing, oil-financed economies of the Persian Gulf countries had attracted foreign workers to the Middle East in the following decades, yet many labour migrants were hit by the expulsion of 'Arab guest workers' during the Persian Gulf crisis in 1991 and again in 2002.



The European Union, itself shaken by waves of neo-nationalism and racist attacks, refined its border control in the aftermath of 9/11, and the 'war against terror' had a negative impact on the everyday lives of Muslims from the Middle East, the Maghreb and Turkey in the countries of the West, paving the way for tightened assimilationist policies in many EU member states.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (2005), among the countries with the highest share of migrant populations, four are in the Middle East, namely, the United Arab Emirates (71.4 per cent), Israel (39.6 per cent), Jordan (39.0 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (25.9 per cent). In addition to the growing numbers of migrants in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, the diversification of flows has increased continuously during the last three decades. Against this backdrop, we have invited contributions to a special issue of *Anthropology of the Middle East* in order to reconsider the dynamics of migration within, from and to the Middle East.

In his contribution to this volume, Ali Modarres confirms the tremendous impact of migration to the Middle East and warns that, facing the huge inflow of migrants to certain parts of the region, failing integration policies of the oil-rich consumer countries may produce a 'permanent "transient" labour population'. Human rights and integration policies are discussed as main concerns in his reflections on Middle East policy recommendations.

In this special issue, however, we particularly aim to shed light on less prominent groups and categories of migration within, from and to the Middle East. The articles demonstrate how the concepts of migration, transnationalism and identity challenge numerous theoretical issues concerning social anthropology. Accordingly, Shahnaz Nadjmabadi focuses on the complexities and experiences of the transnational circuit of the Persian Gulf that offers access to labour markets in the oil-rich Arab countries from the economically deprived south of Iran. Until recently, migration from the Middle East to Indonesia has mainly been studied from a historical perspective. Johann Heiss and Martin Slama show how, today, the 'entrepreneurial diaspora' of the Yemenite Ḥaḍramawt in Indonesia maintains Ḥaḍramī identity through genealogies. Transnational studies have frequently been criticised for ignoring questions of gender and the particularity of women's perspectives. Ruba Salih's comparison of Kurdish, Iranian and Moroccan transnational women's networks not only shows the potential of feminist collaboration, addressing loyalties, political subjectivity and the forms of oppression that they are subjected to, but also refers to the possibility of new hierarchies that might be initiated by the very same mechanisms and activities. Since the relevance of refugee studies in the Middle East leads back to the expulsion of Palestinians in the late 1940s, Esther Hertzog's critical anthropological examination of 'absorption centres' in Israel, following the displacement of Ethiopian Jews, offers an important contribution to refugee studies and a critical perspective on the policies of integration and exclusion in the Middle East.

Despite the different countries involved and questions asked, these authors share a common interest in the inter-relation of transnational formations and its historical making. These contributions to migration studies in the Middle East thus offer an in-depth perspective on the simultaneously local and global dynamics of everyday experiences. Although we can observe a rapid growth in migration and transnational studies, the local experiences and translocal connectedness of people in less prominent parts of the world are still under-represented. Innovative outlooks on personal and family networks, the construction of histories and institutions, and the practices of belonging and exclusion across borders are discussed in this volume according to their particular flows – within, from and to the Middle East.

– Sabine Strasser and Shahnaz R. Nadjmabadi, co-editors