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Workshop 16

***Senders Turned into Receivers:
Transit Migration in the Middle East and North Africa***

directed by

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Workshop abstract

All major countries of emigration of the Middle East & North Africa (MENA), from Morocco to Turkey and from Egypt to Yemen, have recently turned into receivers of immigrants while remaining senders of emigrants. Some of these immigrants are workers responding to a demand unmet by local supply on the labour market, while others are ‘transit migrants’, i.e. persons who were initially trying to reach a more distant destination—Europe, North America, Gulf states—but found themselves stuck at the gate of their intended destination because of increasingly restrictive policies regarding the admission and stay of aliens and reinforced border controls.

Governments see transit migrants as unwanted newcomers, because of the many challenges they represent to their economy (labour markets are already confronted with unemployment among nationals), society (transit migrants form additional groups in precarious conditions), and administrative apparatus (being traditional countries of emigration, they often have a deficit of regulations and institutions dealing with the entry and settlement of foreigners).

Empirical studies deliver a more mitigated image of the phenomenon than the mostly negative view adopted by governments and raise questions such as: are transit and illegal migrants only a burden or also an opportunity for transit countries? Is transit and illegal migration driven by the supply in neighbouring countries or the demand on MENA labour markets? Is it an upgrading or a downgrading process for migrants? Is there a balance between policies aimed at transit migrants’ readmission in origin countries and those aimed at their integration in society?

The workshop aims to gather together scholars researching transit migration in different parts of the MENA (Maghreb, Mashreq, Turkey) and from different disciplines, with a view to producing an edited volume.

Workshop description

All traditional countries of emigration in the MENA, from Morocco to Turkey and from Egypt to Yemen, have recently turned into receivers of immigrants while remaining senders of emigrants. A cycle of immigration has started before the cycle of emigration send any signal of reaching an end. Part of the immigration they receive is transit migration.

Transit is defined as “a stopover of passage, of varying length, while travelling between two or more countries” (IOM 2004, p.66). Most persons in transit are not migrants, but simple international travellers who will return to their country of departure once their travel is finished. However, an increasing number of migrants are in a situation of transit, whereby they stay provisionally in a country with the intention of reaching another country they were initially bound for.

Transit migration is a new phenomenon which reflects a paradox: while the circulation of persons is continuously easier and cheaper, immigration is continuously more difficult and expansive as a result of restrictive legislations on immigration and tightened border controls in most major countries of destination. The number of would-be migrants is dramatically rising while that of legally admitted migrants is stagnating. Many of those who start the journey cannot reach their intended destination but remain stuck at its gate. As a consequence, countries that border major regions of destination of international migrants are turning into places of transit for migrants originally bound for their neighbour. Because the last segment of the journey (to intended destination, from its closest neighbour) is the most expansive one, many migrants need to work and save enough money for paying this last segment. Transit migrants need to go on the labour market in their country of transit in order to continue their travel.

Transit migration has gained tremendous momentum in four regions. First and foremost in the vicinity of the European Union at its external borders, in Eastern Europe and Russia on one side, and in all the South-Mediterranean countries from Mauritania to Turkey on the other side. Secondly, at the border of the Gulf, Yemen has emerged as another key country of transit migration. The third and fourth regions are Central America, at the border of the United States, and South-East Asia at the border of Australia (Hugo, 2006).

Among transit migrants currently staying in the MENA region, one can cite the following groups:

- Sub-Saharan African migrants bound for Europe in transit through the Maghreb countries, from Mauritania to Libya;
- Sudanese and Somali refugees and forced migrants in search of a country of asylum who are stuck in Egypt;
- Migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa trying to reach the Gulf through Yemen;
- Iraqi refugees in Jordan and in other countries of the Machrek;
- Iraqi and other Middle Eastern Migrants transiting through Indonesia from where they try to reach Australia;

- Nationals from former USSR republics, central Asian countries and Iran in transit through Turkey.

Given the instability of migration routes continuously remapped by new barriers put by states and new opportunities opened by networks of former migrants which disseminate information on possible destinations and ways to reach them, the above list is far from being exhaustive. Indeed, besides well identified flows there exist a variety of smaller and rapidly changing streams.

Governments of transit countries see transit migration as an unwanted phenomenon to be contained, for it confronts them with new challenges, in particular the following:

- Economic challenges: local labour markets are already plagued with unemployment, under-employment and low returns to skills among nationals, so that transit (and often illegal) migrants as viewed as undesirable newcomers competing with nationals for scarce resources.
- Social challenges: transit (and often illegal) migrants often form additional groups living in precarious conditions and at risk, and their needs must be addressed while tensions that might arise between immigrant communities and local populations have to be prevented.
- Legal and administrative challenges: most of the countries where transit migrants stay have for long viewed themselves as places of departure, not of arrival, of migratory movements and consequently they are characterised by a deficit in legal provisions governing the entry and settlement of aliens. This deficit may open a door to prolonged transit and even to durable settlement, by contrast with the strong measures of migration containment taken by major traditional countries of immigration. Governments still have to adapt legislations and regulations that were elaborated in the context of sending countries, to a new situation of receiving countries.
- Security challenges: transit migration is linked with the emergence of criminal networks of smugglers and traffickers in human beings.
- Diplomatic challenges: transit migration is becoming a bone of contention in external relations with the countries that migrants were initially intending to reach, as well as with their country of origin. On the other side, transit migration cannot be unilaterally managed by transit countries, but it requires a co-operation with origin and destination countries.

That transit migration be unwanted by governments does not necessarily imply that it is altogether negative for the transit country, its society and economy. Indeed, transit migration is by definition a transitory state for individual migrants, after which they cease being in transit and become ordinary immigrants, whether legal or illegal. Recent findings of empirical research carried out across the MENA on various facets of transit migration deliver a more mitigated image of the phenomenon than the mostly negative view adopted by governments and the media, inviting to explore whether transit migrants are only a burden or also an opportunity for transit countries. They raise questions relating to the economy and the sociology of transit migration.

According to economic theories of international migration, migration would be a mostly demand-driven process. Is it just the same for transit migration?

If transit migration primarily responds to a demand (in illegal workers), which demand is it: that of the intended destination country which the migrant might well never reach, or that of the transit country which is their actual place of immigration? If it is the demand of the transit country, do transit migrants address old needs (by replacing nationals on positions which they now neglect, such as domestic workers, sex workers, farm workers, construction workers), making transit migration a form

of globalisation of the supply of workforce in traditional sectors? Or do they rather address new needs (typically those generated by the migration industry itself)?

If on the contrary transit migration is predominantly supply-driven, is it fostered by factors pertaining to origin countries (such as the collapse of the USSR, civil wars in Central Asia or in the Horn of Africa, the occupation of Iraq, economic despair in Sub-Saharan Africa, etc.), or by factors pertaining to intended destination countries (restrictions put to legal entry)?

From a sociological point of view, there might be a link between transit migration and social mobility in transit countries, including that of non-migrant natives. Transit countries are at the same time immigration and emigration countries. Do transit immigrants replace native emigrants, identically, or is it accompanied by a process of social mobility among non-migrants? According to this hypothesis, emigrated nationals would be replaced by nationals through a process of (generally upward) social mobility, while nationals promoted at higher levels ladder for replacing emigrants would be replaced by foreign transit migrants. As a result, transit migration would foster social promotion among natives in transit countries.

Another sociological question relates to transit migrants themselves: is transit an upgrading or a downgrading process for migrants?

The workshop aims to gather together scholars researching transit migration in different parts of the MENA (Maghreb, Mashreq, Turkey) and from different disciplines, with a view to producing an edited volume or a special issue of a scientific journal.

Researchers conducting empirical work dedicated at collecting and organising fresh information on this emerging category of migrants, at assessing their impact on society and economy in countries of transit, at evaluating their own social and economic condition as transit migrants, or at identifying and analysing policies, regulations and legal instruments that apply to transit migrants, are welcome to apply. Methodological works on sources and techniques of observation and estimation, as well as theoretical works with an application to a %MENA context are also welcome.

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Directors’ individual paper abstracts

Conceptualising Transit Migration in the MENA

Philippe Fargues

The paper will draw on existing literature—from media stories to international organisations or NGO’s reports and scholarly studies—in order to paint a regional picture of transit migration across MENA countries, and to address some general conceptual issues. It will concentrate 1) on the nature of the phenomenon (‘are transit migrants to be regarded stocks or flows?’ a question which becomes

crucial when it comes to estimating the magnitude of transit migration as well as its impact on the receiving society), and 2) on its determinants (is transit migration mainly push- or also pull-driven, and in this case are pull factors to be searched for in the countries of transit or in those of intended destination?).

Transit et immigration en Algérie

Ali Bensaâd

Depuis les villes frontalières sahariennes jusqu'aux métropoles littorales du Nord du pays, les flux de migrants africains tissent leur trame dans l'espace algérien qu'ils marquent de leur empreinte. Celle-ci est bien perceptible dans les villes sahariennes à l'image de Tamanrasset où les migrants africains, originaires de plus de 20 nationalités différentes, constituent plus du tiers des effectifs d'une ville qui abrite plus de 100.000 habitants dans un espace totalement désertique. Mais elle l'est de plus en plus dans les métropoles littorales à l'image d'Alger ou Oran qui abritent des quartiers africains, non seulement en périphérie mais en leur centre.

S'ancrant dans une permanence de courants d'échanges divers, ces flux ont été activés par l'exceptionnel développement connu par la partie algérienne du Sahara auquel faisaient écho crises climatiques et troubles politico-militaires côté sahélien. Ces flux, limités aux pays limitrophes et tolérés parce qu'ils servaient le développement de régions stratégiques et des ambitions géopolitiques, ont balisé les itinéraires transnationaux de migrants d'origines plus lointaines. Tolérés et de toute façon incontrôlés au Sahara, ces flux ont graduellement gagné le Nord en même temps que la fermeture des frontières de l'Europe faisait des itinéraires transsahariens une voie nouvelle. Un réseau relationnel transnational où se croisent différentes circulations (commerçantes, de travail, de transit ou religieuses) se structure.

Ces migrations pénètrent les espaces résidentiels et le marché de l'emploi, où elles ne se limitent plus à certaines « niches » marginales, tandis qu'aucune disposition légale ne les prend en compte. Leur gestion est caractérisée par une ambiguïté où interfèrent besoins de main-d'œuvre au Sud mais soucis de contenir leur montée au Nord, difficulté de contrer des mobilités traditionnelles au risque de déstabilisation, désir de garantir une profondeur géopolitique africaine et injonctions répressives européennes, et surtout difficulté à assumer la nouvelle situation de pays d'immigration. Ces migrations renvoient à la société algérienne des interrogations sur ses fondements, comme le statut de l'étranger, le code de la nationalité, le statut de la femme etc. Ces interrogations contribuent à précipiter les évolutions qui travaillent cette société. Elles créent une intégration par « le bas » et des mixités nouvelles, même si la confrontation aux sociétés locales est parfois génératrice de tensions comme l'ont illustré, en septembre 2005, les attaques perpétrées contre les immigrés à Oran.