



Challenged borders and boundaries: migration a changing Middle East and Europe

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Wednesday 1st July, 15.00 – 17.00

ABSTRACT

It is the idea of this paper to analyze migratory movements following the Arab uprisings, with an ambition of contributing to the development of a sociology of migration in the context of a changing Middle East. Over the last years the surprising developments following the Arab uprisings in many ways challenged our understanding of the region. Long-standing grievances over repression, corruption, and economic hardship clearly played an important role in mobilizing protests in the early phases of the Arab revolts, but also resulted in new migratory movements, which seemed to defy traditional geographical and political notions of borders and boundaries, adding dimensions of unpredictability to the migration patterns affecting the Mediterranean security environment.

Migrants rarely constitute an active part in contentious politics. Rather they tend to be relatively invisible, attempting to escape the attention of an often intolerant if not discriminatory political reality in the receiving country. This might be the case for migrants from the Arab Mediterranean countries having arrived in Europe, but also for African migrants attempting to use the Arab states along the Mediterranean as temporary abode while waiting for possibilities to carry on. Despite the fact that it is possible in this way to identify different types of migrants, it will normally not be meaningful to speak of migrants in group categories or as collective phenomena, and only exceptionally as acting agents or social movements. Migrants, fleeing from problematic living conditions, are mainly travelers with an individual identity and even though they sometimes go together along more or less identical routes, they should be analyzed from this perspective.

However, analyzing migrants based on a distinction between the group and the individual level will not always be valid. Migrants do not lack any kind of social networks. In the organizing of migration processes different kinds of networks become activated: relatives in the receiving or sending country, agencies, human smugglers, national and supra-national organizations and institutions, NGOs and means of communication, media etc. Migratory movements are rarely collective undertakings, but they involve a plethora of societal elements, often in loosely knit organizational structures. Migration processes often take place in legal grey-zones or even in illegal contexts, where criminal agents involved in the complex movements exploit the individual migrants and add to the problematic security environment surrounding the processes.

The changes in the Middle East following the Arab uprisings produced migratory processes, which, due to the surprising and unusual societal developments in the Arab states, tended to be unpredictable. As the societal changes themselves, the migration movements following the historical changes were uncontrollable and anarchistic, also because of the very differentiated reactions by the challenged authoritarian regimes. Migration movements constitute for the sending as well as for the receiving countries a non-traditional security issue, which under conditions as recently in the Middle East are difficult to deal with. The migrants can hardly be understood as agents of the ongoing changes. Rather they are victims of the development, and understanding these processes and their consequences requires the development of a sociology of migration, which takes the complexity of the unexpected and anarchistic development into consideration.