

## Patterns and directions of exile migration from Iraq in the period 1990-2003: a systemic approach<sup>1</sup>

Geraldine Chatelard

Combining the findings of published sources and of original research<sup>2</sup>, this article attempts to put in relations a series of factors at the macro and meso levels so as to produce an evolving but coherent picture of the directions and stages of Iraqi exile migration, of the settlement patterns of migrants, and of their sociological profile at various stages of the migration process, starting from Iraq. The period covered extends from the 1990-1991 Gulf War until the fall of the Ba'hist regime in April 2003, and is characterised by the sharp decline of the national economy and the strong authoritarian drift of the Ba'hist regime. Hence the use of the phrase "exile migration" to qualify a trend within which political and economic factors weight concomitantly albeit not necessarily equally for each migrant. Focus will be on the individuals originating from these areas of Iraq that remained under the control of the central government in Baghdad over the period under consideration – the so-called central and southern provinces- with only marginal references to populations originating from the Kurdish autonomous regions in the north where the socio-economic and political conditions were markedly different.

Within a diachronic framework, attention will be given to the political, economic and societal factors in Iraq that may be identified as the primary determinants of emigration, i.e. acting as push and selecting factors and shaping the sociological and demographic profile of migrants as opposed to internal migrants (mostly internally displaced persons, or IDPs) or non-migrants. Remaining at the macro level, a second element of the system that will be considered is that of the migration and asylum policies and practices in countries of emigration - be they the closest ones in the region, or the distant ones in more prosperous parts of the world. These policies and practices cannot be viewed merely as pull factors or as deterrents responding to the push of domestic Iraqi factors on populations. They also need to be correlated and considered each within its own context<sup>3</sup>.

Within the macro structure of migration constraints and opportunities, a meso, or intermediary level will be considered, that bridges between the macro structure and the level of individual or family-based decision making about migration. This meso level is that of social networks taken in a broad sense to cover actual webs of social relations linking individuals and based on so-called "strong" and "weak" social ties (this distinction being otherwise debatable is not used further in this article). These links can be formal or informal, enduring or transitory, based on an ephemeral common interest, or on more binding elements of social identity such as kinship, ethnicity, citizenship, or religion. Friendship ties, or political and professional connections are also typical basis for network formation or membership<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Partial unpublished translation of: 'Un système en reconfiguration: l'émigration des Irakiens de la guerre du Golfe à la guerre d'Irak (1990-2003)', in H. Jaber and F. Métral (eds.) *Mondes en mouvement. Migrants et migrations au Moyen-Orient au tournant du XXe siècle*, IFPO, Beirut, 2005, pp. 113-155.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork was conducted in Jordan, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia and Western Europe between 1999 and 2003 and several migrants were followed along their migration journeys and after through email exchanges with the author.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, reception conditions of Iraqi migrants at the regional level of the Middle East impact on trends towards so-called Western states that adapt their policies and practices not only in reaction to the flow of Iraqis but to the combined flow of migrants from other nationalities, and to other domestic and regional constraints.

<sup>4</sup> Much is currently being debated and written about the relevance of the social network approach for understanding migration dynamics, in particular in relation to the concept of trans-nationalism (see, among others, Gurak and Caces 1992; Vertovec and Cohen 1999; Faist 2000; Van Hear 2002).

## **I. An overview of Iraqi emigration before 1990**

In a recent historical perspective, Iraq used to attract different categories of immigrants while the Iraqis themselves were not considered to be a nation of emigrants. This statement, which is commonplace in works dealing with Iraq, nevertheless needs to be refined in order to better comprehend the most recent trends of Iraqi emigration. Unlike in-migration, mainly fuelled by the country's economic development, out-migration came largely as a result of domestic or regional political factors typical of post-colonial attempts at the consolidation of regime's rule and at the maintenance of territorial integrity. On the other hand, if the volume of durable emigration was negligible in a national perspective under the monarchy, there existed ancient trends and settlement patterns that determined the direction of subsequent and larger trends, such as the large scale involuntary population movements inaugurated in the late 1960s, and that formed the basis of several discrete migratory systems.

Since the creation of the modern Iraqi state under British Mandate in 1921, almost all successive regimes have been authoritarian, prompting political opponents to take refuge abroad. In this context, the UK has been a haven for Communists since the 1950s, Monarchists after the 1958 military coup, and all other types of anti-Ba'thist movements since the early 1970s, all activists that made up a good part of the Iraqi exile intelligentsia. Alternatively, a number of Communist opponents found refuge in France or Italy where Communist Parties were strong and supportive.

Regionally, Jordan started playing host to families of Iraqi exiles after the fall of the monarchy, as another Hashemite protégé of the British was ruling in Amman. Later, in particular as of the 1970s, Jordan, that had adopted economic policies of a more liberal nature than Iraq's, provided a regional base of operation to Iraqi investors and business people. This Iraqi business elite, highly mobile, often had another base in the UK or elsewhere in the industrialised world, and close family connections with the exile political intelligentsia. In this regard, it can be said that Jordan was an integral part of what could be called the Western system of Iraqi migration.

In addition to party politics, ethnopolitics has been a major determinant of emigration from Iraq. Trends of ethnic or ethnoreligious migration took different directions both regionally and globally. As early as the 1930s, often across Syria and Lebanon, Assyrian Christians from Iraq pioneered trends to the "new countries" of emigration – the Americas and Australia-, alongside members of Levantine minorities. There were shifts in the direction of Assyrian migration (the UK replacing South America), but the trend never came to a halt, especially after the Ba'th enforced its policy of Arabisation of the nation.

It is only during the 1970s that Kurds started to emigrate *en masse* from Iraq. As relations between the Kurdish nationalist leadership and the Ba'thist government were deteriorating, groups of Kurds in the North were indirectly pushed into Iran or Turkey by ethnic Arabs forcefully displaced from the south and compelled to settle in Kurdish zones. The Iraqi Kurds were not welcome in Turkey that was striving to suppress the nationalist claims of its own Kurdish population (Frelick 1997; İçduygu 2000). Following on the footsteps of Turks and Turkish Kurds, Iraqi Kurds settled in Germany as migrant labourers, becoming part of a specific migratory system, and starting a migration chain that has not stopped ever since<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> While considering the effects of nationalist claims on population movements, it is worth mentioning that the Zionist nationalist project over Palestine almost totally emptied Iraq of its thriving Jewish community of half a million individuals. Although historians differ on the immediate causes of their flight, the bulk of Jews left Iraq between the 1950s and the 1970s, partly to Israel, partly to Europe and North America.

The UK, and later the USA, remained the preferred destination for the economic, intellectual and artistic elite of all groups. Until the 1970s in Europe and well into the 1980s in Canada, the USA and Australia, there were almost no legal barriers to this immigration. Except in Germany - the main target of Kurdish emigration in the Western world-, citizenship could be acquired within a few years. Although most migrants from that period fell under the legal category of refugees, including many that were also economic migrants, few did have a claim to such a status. Instead, they preferred to seek integration through economic insertion. Once again excluding a good part of Kurdish migrants, most Iraqi migrants to the West were skilled and able to maintain their position in the middle or upper middle class. Variably and differently according to individual motivation and situation, active participation in the economy, and sometimes in the political life of the new country of residence did not prevent the maintenance of economic, socio-cultural, political or religious ties and identities associated with Iraq. Cultural and political associations, communal and religious structures were set up in each and every emigration country<sup>6</sup>. The various diasporas from Iraq probably maintained manifold loose or tighter relations between themselves and with individuals in Iraq. Clarifying the circulation of news, money, goods and people between diaspora communities and with Iraq in the period 1970s-1980s would certainly help understand better how social networks were used in migration in the next period when Western states aimed at bringing labour migration to a halt.

Migration trends between Iraq and Iran can be said to belong to a separate migratory system, only loosely connected to the one encompassing Jordan and a number of Western industrialised countries. As of the 1970s, the volume of Iraqi migration to Iran was much higher than to Western states. This migration trend was also of a different nature: because of its immediate causes - huge waves of individuals being forcefully expelled to Iran on alleged accusation of family or political ties with this country; because of the socio-religious profile of the migrants who were mostly Shi'a Moslems, although different individuals attached different meanings to this affiliation; because of much more socioeconomic diversity among the migrants; and finally because of the way they were received in Iran. Iraqi migrants to Iran were forcefully displaced people whereas those exiles circulating within the Western migratory system could be better described as involuntary or reluctant migrants (all nuances on a continuum of forced migration depending on the degree and nature of the coercion exerted). Over twenty years, Iran absorbed 200,000 to 300,000 Shi'a Kurds (known as Fayli Kurds), as many non-Kurds of alleged Iranian origin, supporters of the Islamic Revolution, and several thousands army defectors, accepting the deportees as Iranian citizens if they could prove their ties to the country, and granting all other Iraqis a status as "panahandegan" that is refugees with right to work and to access the same social benefits as Iranians and the possibility to be granted Iranian citizenship after a number of years of residence<sup>7</sup>. Among the Iraqi exiles, many, and in particular those who had gained status as refugees and not as Iranian citizens, stayed in the South of the country to work in the oil industry. Others clustered in neighbourhoods either in Tehran, around the exiled leaders of the Islamist opposition to the Ba'th, or in the Holy City of Qom<sup>8</sup>. A majority of the exiles went no further

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<sup>6</sup> The only systematic account of such an Iraqi exile community is that of the Assyrian Christians in London by M. Al-Rasheed (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Since 1979, Iran was the country in the world hosting the largest number of refugees, up to 4.5 million at some point, with extremely limited support from the international community: deemed a "rogue state" by the successive US Administrations, it was subject to an economic embargo and was politically extremely isolated on the international stage (Rajaei 2000).

<sup>8</sup> The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran was a boost to Shi'a Islamism in Iraq that had already started to replace communism as the primary vehicle the Shi'a sociological minority used to express political discontent. From 1965 to 1978, Ayatollah Khomeini was in exile in the Iraqi Shi'a Holy City of Najaf where he elaborated his theory of the "political rule of the religious scholar" (*vilayat-e faqih*), borrowing heavily from the thinking of the Iraqi scholar and religious leader Mohammad Baqr as-Sadr. In 1980, just before Iraq entered war with Iran, agents of the Iraqi regime

than Iran and kept minimal ties with relatives in other diaspora countries. A minority moved on to Turkey or other neighbouring countries, at times managing to connect to one or the other diaspora in the West.

## **II. Iraqi emigration in the period 1991-2003**

In 2003, the Iraqi diaspora worldwide was estimated between 2 and 4 million people, half of this number having left Iraq in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War<sup>9</sup>. The domestic political and ethno-political determinants of emigration were amplified as an indirect consequence of the 1991 Gulf war, while, for the first time in the contemporary history of Iraq, the deteriorating economic situation can be said to have been acting as a direct incentive for some categories of the population to emigrate. The directions and settlement patterns of Iraqi emigration, for their part, underwent notable changes in the mid-1990s, with the result that previously separated migratory systems came to overlap. This shift was due to a combination of developments on the domestic stage, and of factors that affected the wider opportunity structure of Iraqi emigrants at the regional and global levels. Some social networks efficiently reacted to these changes, redeploing geographically and adapting their *modus operandi* to keep allowing the emigration of their members through different routes and towards different destinations.

### **II.1 The domestic and regional stages**

#### *II.1.a Repression as a push factor*

In the immediate aftermath of the February 1991 Gulf War, waged against Iraq by a US-led coalition to force a withdrawal of the Iraqi army from occupied Kuwait, uprisings in the south and north of the country erupted. Faced with repression, including the use of weapons of mass destruction, over 1 million Kurds in the north fled to Iran, while Turkey kept its border closed. In 1992, under US and British aerial protection, part of Iraqi Kurdistan was made a region largely autonomous from the rule of Baghdad. Those Kurdish refugees to Iran that used to be residents of the now autonomous region repatriated. Others, despite originating from regions that had remained under Ba'thist control, also preferred to leave Iran to resettle in the autonomous zone. Most Feili Kurds, who had come from urban centres in the centre and south of Iraq, remained in Iran.

Even before turning to crush the Kurdish uprising, Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard started exerting a brutal and collective repression against those Shi'a suspected of anti-regime activities in the cities of southern Iraq - Basra, Najaf, Karbala and Nasiriyah. In March-April 1991, within weeks, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 were killed, and 500,000 were sent to look for asylum in Iran. The border zone with Saudi Arabia being still under US military control, 35,000 mainly Shi'a refugees poured into the Kingdom where they were contained in camps close to the border. Many more stayed within Iraq and took refuge in the marshlands in the south - in the triangle between the town of 'Amara, Nasiriyah and Basorah. This zone, the Hawr, had traditionally

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executed as-Sadr while several thousands of its followers were expelled to Iran, in particular Ayatollah Mohamed Baqr al-Hakim who was to remain in exile in Tehran as the leader of the Iraqi Shi'aa Islamist opposition.

<sup>9</sup> For the period under consideration, there exist no reliable estimates of the total number of Iraqi nationals living abroad, and various figures are used in reports by international organisations (AIJ-FIDH 2003; Amnesty International 1997; UNHCR 1996). The only category which size can be assessed with a relative degree of certainty - see Bakewell (1999) and Crisp (1999) for a critical appraisal of refugee statistics- is that of those Iraqis that have been granted a form or another of status as refugees by host states or by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Those were roughly 600,000 in 2003 (UNHCR 2002; USCR 2002).

offered protection and shelter to opponents, fugitives and smugglers in its very dense vegetation and network of aquatic channels.

In 1993, the regime initiated a large-scale drainage project in the marshes, aiming all together at reclaiming land for agriculture, at allowing exploitation of oil resources, at destroying the cache of evaded convicts and other fugitives, and at sealing the border with Iran from where the al-Badr Brigade, the military arm of the Shi'a Islamist opposition, was infiltrating Iraq. Forced displacement of the rural Shi'a inhabitants of the marshlands was on the agenda. Their natural habitat destroyed by drainage and napalm, their villages shelled and burned, thousands were forcefully displaced to the cities in the centre and in the part of Kurdistan that had remained in Ba'hist hands - oil-rich Kirkuk in particular, where Arabisation was still being enforced to dismiss any claims to sovereignty by Kurdish parties. The marshes extending across the border with Iran, many of their inhabitants ran there for their lives, an attempt facilitated by the fact that certain tribal groups had members on both sides.

Marsh Arabs were joined by a steady trickle of refugees that came from the major Shi'a urban centres - including Baghdad. Those were fleeing the intense repression that followed the 1991 uprising and that targeted in priority the religious establishment and suspected followers of pro-Iranian movements. Several prominent clerics were arrested. Some were assassinated or died in mysterious circumstances. Religious students and their families were also the victims of repression, while relatives - sometimes extended families- were continuously harassed. Within Iraq, several schools of thought within the Shi'a community, specifically the most politicised ones, were literally beheaded. Najaf lost its scholarly pre-eminence, while the pilgrimage to Karbala was restricted and Iranian pilgrims being banned from entering Iran.

#### *II.1.b Iraqi exiles in Iran*

As long as Iran continued to be accessible through the marshes, most of those who were sympathisers of trends of Shi'a political Islam or who had family members there kept taking refuge in the Islamic Republic. For many individuals who were not ideologically motivated, Iran was simply the easiest destination, the cheapest one in terms of travel costs to be paid to cross the border without documents (see below), and the one that offered the most secure status as a refugee, with no risk of expulsion.

Many of the so-called Marsh Arabs (or Ma'adan), of rural background and with a very low level of education, remained in refugee camps in the south and centre of Iran, lacking the social connections to be sponsored out of the camps (a compulsory step to become an urban refugee), and the educational or professional skills that could be negotiated on the Iranian work market (the Afghans occupying most unskilled niches). Others refugees from the marshes, that had tribal connections on the Iranian side, moved out of the camps into squatter areas, eking out a meagre living without the assistance of the Iranian government and NGOs.

Since the 1970's, Iraqi neighbourhoods had developed in suburbs of Ahwaz and Dezful, the major urban centres in the industrial, oil-producing south western province of Khuzestan. They were populated by the industrious middle class of Feyli Kurds and Shi'a Arabs, self employed or wage labourers. Religious scholars expelled from Iraq and their followers were concentrated in Qom, teaching or studying in seminaries, preaching, and producing religious knowledge. Leaders of the political opposition had settled close to the Iranian seat of government in Tehran, dragging behind them a whole exile community that had taken residence in a neighbourhood in the southern area of the capital and had its communal institutions, such as an Iraqi school. These were the main clusters, but there were Iraqis scattered all over the Iranian territory.

Although social stratification and a division of social roles (political, religious, productive) translated into geographical segregation, the various groups of Iraqi exiles in Iran maintained manifold ties that allowed for a measure of political and social cohesion between them. Under the political leadership of exiled figures, granted moral legitimacy by their being clerics, anti-Ba'thist guerrilla fighters were recruited from camp refugees, and were trained and commanded by officers who had defected from the Iraqi army. The well established religious and political leadership mediated between the Shi'a communities world-wide and the needy Iraqi refugees in Iran. As far away as New York or London, Karachi and Benares, wherever communities of Shi'a Moslem thrived and spiritual leaders were sensitive to the plea of their Iraqi brethren, funds raised at the occasion of special solidarity campaigns or part of the sums collected yearly as a religious contribution, the *khoms*, was allocated to charities established in Iran by the various Iraqi opposition parties. NGOs were catering for the needs of refugees in camps or in urban areas: some had set up schools, other ran clinics that were staffed by competent Iraqi professionals, all distributed clothes and other relief items. Perhaps the strongest cohesive force, fuelled by the discourse of the political and religious leadership, was the common perception Iraqis had of having experienced religious persecution at the hands of the impious Ba'thist regime.

There were nevertheless fault lines inside each social group. Several political trends coexisted, most having regrouped under the umbrella of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), headed by Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim. But the al-Da'wa al-Islamiyah, the historical Islamist opposition party founded in Iraq by Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, had left the coalition at the beginning of the 1990s. In Qom, most Iraqi religious scholars supported the political model of the Iranian revolution, yet a smaller group was opposed to the involvement of clerics in politics, following the teachings of the *marja'* Abulqasem al-Khoei. This prominent Iraqi scholar, who died in Iraq in 1992 and was replaced by 'Ali al-Sistani as a spiritual guide, had established an international cultural and charitable foundation in the late 1980s that had no official representation in Iran. Instead, it was extending its influence from its headquarters in London.

Last but not least, previous and ancient class and ethnic cleavages were maintained in the Iranian exile between rural tribal Marsh Arabs and urban-based notables, between lineages of Persian origin and families of Arab or Kurdish stock. In the south, assisted and destitute Marsh Arabs, on the one hand, and the industrious middle-class society of Iraqi exiles, on the other hand, remained largely apart. As for families of Persian origin, they had settled in urban centres where they had relatives, such as Qom and Esfahan, rarely if ever intermarrying with Arabs and Kurds.

As of 1995, the Iraqi authorities had almost completed the drainage of the marshlands and had heavily mined the border with Iran. As a result, it became increasingly dangerous to attempt border crossing. Iran, for its part, was experiencing an economic crisis that found its origin as much in the economic and human costs of the war with Iraq as in the continuing international embargo. The refugee issues started being instrumentalised in the domestic and international political arenas. Refugees were castigated as the cause for the high unemployment rate and more pressing calls were launched to the international community for sharing the costs of refugee relief and assistance. Little was achieved in terms of international "burden-sharing". The election of Mohammad Khatami as President of the Islamic Republic in 1997 further prompted a reconsideration of the country's generous asylum policy. Khatami abandoned much of the previous pan-Islamic rhetoric and policies and refocused on national priorities (Rajaei 2000).

Disincentive measures were adopted aimed at preventing more refugees and irregular migrants to pour in, and at convincing those already on the territory to go back home. In particular, certain categories of refugees (such as "muhajirun") were denied the right to work and to own

properties. Afghans, who were up to 2 millions in Iran, with alternating or concomitant waves of returnees and refugees - many failing to register to evade seclusion in camps- following the upheavals of the domestic military and political stage in their home country, were the primary targets of these measures. They also directly affected the most vulnerable sectors of the Iraqi exiles, i.e. Marsh Arabs and the working middle class. Many individuals lost their jobs as a result of the new policy. Yet unlike what happened with the Afghans, the Iranian government did not seek the mass repatriation of Iraqis. Numerous Iraqis from previous waves who had been granted status as *panabadegan* even became Iranian citizens and disappeared from the refugee statistics<sup>10</sup>. At another level, the political shift Iran was experiencing had repercussions on the Iraqi exiled political leadership. The Iranian polity was split between reformists lead by Khatami and conservatives, followers of 'Ali Khamenei, who has replaced Imam Khomeini as the moral authority over the Islamic state. The SCIRI was ideologically akin to the conservatives, and the election of Khatami forced the coalition to limit its guerrilla actions, but also its educational activities in Arabic for refugee children.

As of the mid-1990s, as a result of the cumulative effects of domestic political and economic factors in both Iraq and Iran, the conditions of access, reception and activism for the Iraqis exiled in Iran were not as good as they used to be. The new context created a different framework of opportunities for prospective emigrants, the first constraints being exerted within Iraq.

### *II.1.c Leaving Iraq*

Leaving Iraq was not an easy endeavour. In the first years of the 1990's, the Iraqi authorities had adopted measures to prevent the long term emigration of both the political opponents that were going abroad to reinforce anti-regime propaganda and activities, and the skilled and educated middle class that was the one suffering most from the deteriorating economic situation ensuing from the economic and trade embargo imposed over Iraq by the UN in 1990. Most Iraqis that were not previously used to travelling internationally did not have a passport. Suspected opponents and their extended families were systematically denied one. Civil servants had to justify their travel plans. More generally, it was rare that several members of a household were granted a travel document at the same time. In a bureaucracy where corruption was widespread, numerous Iraqis obtained passports through bribes amounting to several hundreds dollars. This was only the initial cost of emigration. The regime had adopted financial disincentives, setting compulsory exit fees at the equivalent of US\$ 300-400, creating an extraordinary burden on individuals. On the other hand, prospective migrants always had the option to pay specialised people to guide them across borders. This was the usual way to Iran, official border crossings having long been closed. But the price and the danger had increased with the mining. To prevent emigration, the Iraqi authorities had taken other deterrence measures, like death penalty, later reduced to ear amputation, for those who were known to have been granted status as refugees abroad or who had simply launched an asylum claim. By its measures, the Iraqi state had *de facto* created the category of "illegal emigrants", people who knew that their flight would not go unreported and that relatives left behind would fall under the surveillance and harassment of the security forces. Generally speaking, members of the security apparatus were known to apply arbitrary decisions to anybody who did not have the proper connections with the establishment, if only as a means to get bribes. There were means to leave Iraq, but they were either costly or dangerous for oneself or for one's relatives.

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<sup>10</sup> As of the 1990s, Iran started to adopt a double system to enumerate Iraqis as refugees, at times including *panahandegan*, at times excluding them from statistics with the result that a difference of 250,000 individuals appears in different official documents.

Land routes were the only available ones, the embargo having durably halted all international air and maritime traffic to the country. Iran becoming inaccessible, it left those who wanted to flee few possibilities. Just after 1991, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Syria had sealed off their borders to Iraqis, and infiltration was almost impossible. Crossing illegally into Turkey was feasible with the help of Kurdish smugglers, but it required first accessing the Iraqi autonomous northern zone across mine fields, as official crossing was controlled and registered. Moreover, unlike Iran, Turkey had chosen to offer Iraqis (and other non-Europeans) no asylum, having signed the 1967 Protocol while retaining the original geographical limitations of the 1951 Convention. Ankara practised harsh policies towards irregular migrants from Iraq, returning those it caught back across the border. The only ones that could hope to escape *refoulement* were ethnic Turkmen, often granted a form of status as refugees, or even citizenship. There was no way to evade ethnic profiling and assignation, and for the Kurds, the Arabs and the Assyrians, Turkey was at best a transit route to Europe, not as a host country. The ethnic and religious/sectarian factors aside, directions and routes of Iraqi emigration depended first and foremost on what one was aiming at (reuniting with relatives, looking for economic prospects or an education, claiming asylum, or a combination of those) and where one was aiming to (a nearby host state, or an emigration/asylum country further afield).

#### *II.1.d Kurds and other groups*

For the Kurds in northern Iraq who had evaded direct Ba'thist rule, emigration was now undertaken primarily to reunite with family members that were in Western Europe, mainly in Germany, to look for better economic opportunities, or to escape from an environment rendered unsafe by rivalry between Kurdish factions. Like the rest of Iraq, the Kurdish autonomous zone was under the UN-imposed sanction regime and the economic and humanitarian situation was poor compared to previous periods, albeit better than in the rest of the country. Because the legal possibilities for labour migration to Western Europe had sharply declined since the 1980's, the Kurds kept applying for asylum when reaching Germany as a way to take a legal foothold there. Chain migration ensued with recourse to family reunification schemes. Alongside the European Union's process of integration came profound changes in border control policies between EU states and with countries immediately bordering them. National asylum regulations were also being modified, sometimes in line with the legal harmonisation process called for in Brussels, sometimes following domestic political dynamics. These factors forced a redirection of the flow of Kurdish migrants towards countries that had more lenient asylum regulations than the new ones Germany adopted in the mid-1990s, i. e. the UK, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. More and more did not go farther than Greece, where they could insert in the informal economy and managed to remain without a legal status. Illegality increased among Iraqi Kurds having migrated to Europe. As EU countries were becoming more numerous to sign so-called "readmission agreements" with non-EU countries, particularly Turkey, a growing number of irregular Kurdish migrants were returned to northern Iraq across the border with Turkey.

The situation was very different in the centre and south of Iraq, in particular among the Shi'a. In 1996, and again in 1998-1999, there were episodes of mass arrests and execution of spiritual leaders, including some of the most revered ones in the Shi'a world. Those who fled were still inclined to go to Iran for ideological reasons, and because, most of the time, they already had relatives there. But as of the mid-1990's, the safest and cheapest way out for them was to Jordan, a path that had been previously trodden by exiles with a rather different political outlook, albeit partly with a similar socioeconomic profile. Yet it would be partial to emphasise only the Shi'a as having been the victims of the regime that hardened its stance on all declared or suspected opponents, multiplying arrests, torture, executions, and intimidation of relatives that also targeted individuals of other sects and denominations. Members of the IPC continued fleeing, so did



those who wanted to resist forced Arabisation. Moreover, by then, it was enough for many to want to reunite with relatives who had emigrated in previous years or months. As much as economic and political push factors in Iraq, chain dynamics were propelling Iraqi emigration.

### *II.1.e Economic determinants*

People did not durably emigrate from Iraq solely for motives of individual or group persecution. Oil-producing Iraq had once been a model of development for the Arab world, although before the 1991 Gulf war the economy was already in disarray as a result of the war with Iran. In the 1990's, the country's economy plunged as an effect of the embargo on Iraqi oil for export and on numerous goods for import. Unemployment rocketed, reaching 50% in Baghdad and 75% in Basra, Iraq's second largest city. Inflation also reached peaks: an average salary in the mid-1990's was US\$ 3 to \$5 a month, when monthly food expenses alone could run \$2 to \$6. In a number of cases, the so-called security services used economy as a tool of repression, depriving people from their means of livelihood by firing them from their jobs in the public sector. Out-of-work engineers started driving taxis, doctors took on second jobs as painters, others lived on cash sent from relatives abroad (but it was difficult to send large sums, the banking system being nationalised and controlled, and the operations of parallel money-transfer companies suffering from the intense control of the security services). The most affected sector of the population was the relatively large middle class who was experiencing impoverishment while members of the regime's apparatus had kept thriving under the embargo. Professionals, blue-collar workers and the likes, and also members of the merchant class that were formerly accustomed to living in cities with a very high standard of urban development and services were now being forced to live at what they saw as third world standards. Most often than not, a serious desire to leave stemmed from the mix of constant harassment, feeling of insecurity, and dramatic drop in one's standard of living. In short, the Iraqi state was guaranteeing neither the physical nor the economic security of its citizens. Many of those who ended up in neighbouring countries and later in Europe, America or Australia were not directly forced to flee, but were compelled to. They were reluctant or involuntary migrants, all the more that leaving almost always meant severing ties with those left behind.

The hyperinflation of the 1990s, that had depreciated poorer Iraqis' fixed incomes, and the disincentive measures taken by the government, had a self-selective effect on the direction of Iraqi emigration. Migrants with financial means could choose between Iran and Jordan, the latter country entailing a costly trip. Until the mid-1990s, the choice could be ideologically motivated: some ruled out any exile but in Iran, while Jordan appeared as a choice by default for those who ruled out exile in Iran because of the nature of the Iranian polity. Many migrants took additional or altogether different factors into account, such as the presence/absence of well established relatives, prospects of regaining a lost socioeconomic standard, this possibility being highly dependent on the adequacy of the job offer to one's professional profile. Finally, as will be developed in the next paragraph, Jordan could be seen either as a permanent haven, or as a transit stage towards other Arab countries where jobs were available, or towards industrialised countries where asylum seeking had become the Iraqi exiles' preferred strategy to take a legal foothold. On the other hand, no option but Iran was left for the poorer Iraqi forced or involuntary migrants, i. e. those who were still leading subsistence-oriented lives in the marshes, and that were not all ideologically attracted by the Islamic Republic.

This pattern changed as of 1995-1996, with a very sharp decline in the number of Iraqis entering Iran, and a major redirecting of the flow towards Jordan. In view of the profile of Iraqi migrants to Jordan in the latter period, among whom Marsh Arabs were few, and knowing that forced displacement from the Marshes continued albeit on a lesser scale (Fawcett and Tanner 2002), it

can be hypothesised that poverty was a major determinant in preventing border-crossing and regional out-migration, the least well-off forced or involuntary migrants remaining within Iraq as IDPs. This holds equally true for many Assyrians and Kurds from the areas of Mossul and Kirkuk who moved no further than to northern Iraq, and for the displaced Marsh Arabs, scattered in the centre and south, in particular in informal neighbourhoods in large urban centres.

### *II.1.f Iraqi migration to Jordan*

When migration to Iran came to a standstill, the flow was partly redirected towards Jordan unprepared and unwilling to host such a large number of refugees. In Jordan, "refugee" was an extremely loaded term, and a social, political and legal category that was entirely the preserve of the Palestinians. Neither in the law, nor in collective representations was there a space to consider the Iraqis as "refugees". Arguably, the same applied to Lebanon and Syria. Unlike Iran or even Turkey (however imperfectly for the latter), none of these countries was party to any international legal instrument relating to refugees or had devised a domestic legal framework for asylum granting.

An important factor in assessing the role of Jordan in this massive trend of migration from Iraq is the economic interdependency of the two countries in the 1990s during which Jordan remained Iraq's first economic partner. This relation meant in practice that the border-crossing point between the two countries was never closed. The Hashemite Kingdom has been the gateway to the outside world for the Iraqi business or political elite that has continued to prosper under the embargo, that has never stopped travelling internationally, and whose members sometimes had also financial assets in Jordan. In many ways, Jordan was an extension of Iraq, granting Iraqis almost unconditional entry (but conditional long-term stay), allowing the Iraqi international businessmen and cross-border traders alike to skirt the embargo, but also tolerating the presence of the ba'athist intelligence services (the *mukhabarat*).

Faced with large scale Iraqi emigration, the Jordanian authorities adopted a *laissez-faire* policy: no restriction upon entry, no systematic arrest or expulsion of illegal migrants, no stable status, no right to work, extremely limited access to public social services, few attempts at policing the market of services for illegal emigration to Western countries. While Iran had contained Iraqi refugees, Jordan was letting the flow pass through its territory in direction of countries that offered protection and asylum. As a result, the volume and directions of Iraqi migration to Western countries was directly affected.

Jordan's non-policy towards those Iraqis that were fleeing the regime means that there are only unreliable figures of Iraqi emigration to Jordan, and that, within estimates, it is difficult to disaggregate the number of exiles from that of others types of migrants. Those Iraqis that were leaving Iraq with no intention to return under the prevailing conditions never arrived *en masse* in Jordan, but in relatively small and steady numbers, more as a trickle than as a flow. Yet the number of Iraqis that came to Jordan between 1991 and early 2003 and did not return to Iraq subsequently, either staying in the Hashemite Kingdom or transiting it over a more or less long period of time, could be as high as 1,5 million. Before 1996, Iraqi residents in Jordan were roughly 100,000; in 2002, they were about 350,000. Just before the 2003 US and British military intervention, only 30,000 of them were legally permanent residents, while another 10,000 to 15,000 were temporary circular migrants. This left over 300,000 Iraqis that could be considered exiled. Only 5,000 to 7,000 of those were either asylum seekers or refugees under the mandate of UNHCR. Most of the rest had overstayed their temporary visit permit and were remaining clandestinely. As was been the case since the Gulf War, the group was in permanent recomposition as new individuals kept arriving from Iraq, and others left Jordan to emigration

countries further afield. Yet there was a stable core of legal and long-term illegal residents, the latter having found the connections and the protection that allowed them to eke out a living in the informal sectors of the economy and to avoid expulsion back to Iraq.

During the early 1990s, mass emigration from Iraq took place mainly in the direction of Iran, responding to the repression that followed the so-called Shi'a and Kurdish uprisings of 1991. Iran generally granted Iraqis a form or another of status as refugees, if not always prospects of local integration (Rajaei 2000). Those who came to Amman in view of staying long-term made a conscious choice of Jordan over Iran, with which they had no political and often no religious affinity. Most often than not, their decision to leave Iraq stemmed from a serious feeling of insecurity: a dramatic drop in one's standard of living ensuing from the deterioration of the economic situation, sometimes coupled with harassment by the authorities, if not direct persecution. They were among the most educated, starting the brain drain the regime was fearing, and against which disincentive measures were soon adopted: passport and exit fees were raised and family members left behind were often harassed. High social and financial costs reinforced the self-selective effects of migration by penalising the less well off or those that were unable to mobilise cross border and/or transnational social networks.

As a result, one category of migrants came to Jordan with the original aim of transiting, in general activating family reunification schemes from foreign embassies and the office of UNHCR in Amman. Canada, Australia and the USA initially granted a number of emigration visas. Sponsorship schemes for humanitarian refugees also existed in Australia and Canada. All these options favoured those who already had close relatives in Western countries, or who were members of communities long-established in such countries and that could use communal associations as sponsors. This was in particular the case with the members of the various Christian denominations.

Another substantial group of Iraqi exiles in Jordan was that of professionals that were originally in demand: engineers, doctors, university professors and high-level artists were able to find employment, generally in Amman, and were granted residency and a work permit. At a time when they had the option to improve their situation by integrating into the Jordanian job market, this was the solution many selected over attempting a dubious legal or clandestine migration to a Western country, even with good chances of being granted refugee status. Only a marginal number of exiles approached the Amman office of UNHCR, since most feared it might be infiltrated by the Iraqi intelligence, which meant insecurity for those left behind.

Yet as early as 1994, it had become almost impossible to find legal employment in Jordan while most Western countries had stopped granting emigration visas, and many had adopted more restrictive measures on family reunification. Until 1998, there remained limited possibilities to leave Jordan after negotiating a work contract with Yemen, Libya or Sudan that were short on professionals, options that tended to appeal more to Sunnis than to Shi'a or to Christians. But for the majority of Iraqi exiles in Jordan the only alternative to staying was to attempt clandestine migration, usually to nearby Western Europe. To meet the demand, a market for services to skirt border-control policies developed in Amman, the high costs favouring again those who could access financial capital.

Social networks were called upon to help meet the costs of both life in Jordan and of clandestine migration. Iraqi Christians approached the many well established churches in Jordan. Religious solidarity was mobilised to find housing, work, to receive assistance in kind, access medical services free of charge, or to register children in Christian schools. Jordanian parish priests interceded to prevent deportation back into Iraq, to support visa applications or refugee claims.

According to individual inclinations and to available social identities, other migrants tried to reach out to comrades in the Jordanian Communist Party, to professional associations, to fellow artists, to religious-based Sunni charities, or to the few notables of Iraqi origin whose families were established in Jordan since the 1958 overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Baghdad. They provided Iraqis locally unconnected by kinship ties with an entry into the patron-client structure that is one of the driving forces in the Jordanian society and through which work and housing could be found.

To meet the costs of long-distance emigration, individuals indebted themselves to relatives or close friends scattered all over the world. When the move was planned in advance, part or all of the amount was gathered in Iraq, usually by selling properties. This entailed decisions at the level of a whole household, often of an extended family. Strategic choices were made about where to aim at, who should go first, who should stay in custody of properties. Plans were crafted for the subsequent reunion of all family members. Originally, exile migrants to Jordan were mostly working age males. As their stay in Jordan was enduring, many wives joined their husbands, with the couple's children if they had some. Women, with or without children, later came whose husbands were already in the West and had either asked for family reunification, or gathered enough money to pay for the clandestine journey of the rest of the family (Chatelard 2005).

### *II.1.g Overlapping migration systems*

1996 was a turning point in the patterns of Iraqi exile migration to Jordan. In Iraq, a major wave of repression hit the Shi'a religious establishment and individuals that were suspected of being pro-Iranian. Thousands who would have spontaneously turned to Iran for asylum were willing to flee Iraq. But crossing into the Islamic Republic had become extremely dangerous now that the state-sponsored drainage of the Southern Marches - the traditional southern passage way of refugees to Iran - was almost complete and the border area heavily mined (Clark and Magee 2001). Prospective migrants looked at Jordan, albeit aware that they would not be received as refugees, and that their sectarian affiliation and pro-Iranian inclinations would be problematic. Self-asserting Shi'a were very much alien to Jordanians, no provisions in the law allowed for the development of Shi'a communal institutions such as mosques, the Iranian Revolution was a model for no local political current, and official relations with Iran were cold if not openly tense.

Because of the usual financial constraints, those Iraqi Shi'a who finally made it to Jordan were again members of the educated middle class. They rarely possessed very high financial assets, but enough to bribe their way out of Iraq with the hope that their educational and professional capital would be negotiable on the official Jordanian work market. They soon found that the professional sectors were saturated, and that, without a pattern of relations on which to rely, it was extremely difficult to find even petty jobs, decent housing, and to access a number of basic services. Confronted with what they saw as unacceptable living conditions, the most well off did not stay long in Jordan. They were ready to pay to reach the UK, which hosted the largest Iraqi exile community in the West, and where Shi'a institutions were well developed. The rest of them, having exhausted their savings on exit and within a few months of their stay in Jordan, experienced a sharp social downfall and what they sensed was religious discrimination. Devoid of legal rights, including that of practising their religion collectively or of getting married, divorced or buried according to their rite, many lived well below the poverty line in extremely poor housing and unsanitary conditions. Whereas they had once been among the intellectual elite of their community, they deeply resented having to live side by side with the lowest strata of the Jordanian population. Unable to work legally, many had to compete with unskilled Egyptians on the informal labour market. Within a couple of years, a process similar to the one experienced by the earlier wave of Iraqi exiles took place. Men were joined by wives and children. Specialised

travel agents were already offering their services from Amman to Western countries. On the other hand, since 1992, pioneer Iraqi Shi'a had been arriving legally in North America, Northern Europe or Australia as resettled refugees mainly from the Rafha refugee camp in Saudi Arabia. Those unsatisfied with their lot in Jordan contacted their kin who had a stable legal status and better economic conditions. The latter sent funds to the former, fuelling the chain migration of Iraqi Shi'a across Jordan and their geographical dispersal, whereas Iran had largely absorbed previous waves.

Iraqi Shi'a also managed to develop locally their own support networks based on sectarian ties, although the group was never structured to the point of recreating a community. Small scale religious gatherings took place on a regular basis, scattered in various neighbourhoods in the Greater Amman, each headed by a member of the clergy, often a young theology student able to reach out to resources within the world-wide Shi'a community. On a spiritual level, these gatherings gave a religious sense to the collective experience of their members as marginalised exiles. On a practical level, they allowed for the exchange of information about the situation in Iraq, livelihood opportunities in Jordan, and the possibility of further emigration. Finally, they acted as financial support networks and, in priority for clerics, they covered the cost of migration to the West, generally to the UK, that could be a mere stage before finally reaching Iran.

After a thaw in relations, Syria reopened its border with Iraq in 1997. Whereas the 40,000 Iraqis that had been in Syria since 1991, tolerated albeit with no clear status, were mainly Assyrians that had joined co-ethnics long established there, the post-1997 trends were very similar to the ones to Jordan. In addition to cross-border traders and other circular migrants, most exiles were Shi'a that joined existing religious institutions in and around Damascus. Once in Syria, the road to Lebanon was open for reconnecting with the Shi'a community there, in particular the Hezbollah that could provide means of opposition to the Iraqi regime. Both countries also became new exit gates from the Middle East for Iraqi exiles en route to Europe and that boarded ships that later landed in Greece or Italy. Yet, probably under pressure from Baghdad, the Syrian and Lebanese authorities were quick to clamp down on Iraqi illegal migrants in Lebanon and send them back to Iraq.

## **II.2 Asylum migration: the global stage**

In 2002, human rights organisations were arguing that half of the total number of Iraqis residing abroad had a well-founded fear of persecution had they returned under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Yet only 530,000 had any formal recognition as refugees under one or another status, which still made them the third largest refugee caseload in the world. That same year, UNHCR statistics showed that more people from Iraq than any other country had sought asylum worldwide. Roughly 25% of all Iraqis recognised as refugees have found asylum in a Western country, almost half of this number having been resettled under the auspices of UNHCR from first host countries in the Middle East that did not offer Iraqi refugees asylum or long-term integration - mainly Saudi Arabia and Jordan for ethnic Arabs, and Turkey for the Kurds. Among the other half, the overwhelming majority had reached Western Europe, North America or Australia by clandestine means, alongside other co-nationals whose asylum claim was ultimately rejected, or who never approached the authorities in charge of refugee status determination in the country in which they had settled.

### *II.2.a Directions and determinants of asylum migration*

Although new Iraqi exiles had kept arriving in Western Europe all through the 1980's in small but steady numbers, a clear upsurge in asylum application is noticeable was of 1991. This came as a

result not only of the deteriorating situation of human rights and the economy in Iraq. The other reason was the limitation of legal possibilities to enter Western Europe and settle there as labour migrants, students, etc. Unlike exiles of the older generation who had migrated legally and had often preferred the status of labour migrants over that of refugees, most members of the new generation had no choice but to arrive clandestinely and to launch an asylum claim even though they would have rather sought residency and integration through their professional skills. This process has been called asylum migration (Borjas and Crisp 2005).

The new Iraqi asylum migrants settled in Norway, Sweden, Denmark or the Netherlands. This was mainly due to the more liberal asylum policies these states had adopted, and to the fact they took in Iraqis refugees for resettlement in the early 1990s, therefore creating the possibility for potential and actual migrants to establish social networks that were going to fuel chain, mostly illegal migration. Following the settlement of Iraqi Shi'a in these countries, communal institutions were established. Nevertheless, the UK had remained the preferred destination of religious scholars since a seminary (*hawza 'ilmiyah*) allowed them to pursue their religious education and teaching. This new group of migrants maintained few ties if any with the old Iraqi diaspora. In the new cohort, there were fewer militants of secular political ideologies, and more people for whom religious identity as Shi'a was socially and politically meaningful, if only because it has caused them to suffer at the hands of the Iraqi regime's agents. Amongst the new migrants, there were also people who still defined themselves as secular, or members of other religious sects or denominations that variously emphasised their Sunni or Christian affiliation. But whereas in the heydays of the Iraqi Communist Party and other secular ideologies religious identities were downplayed among the exile communities, since the 1990s they tended to be more meaningful in determining types of interactions between members of the Iraqis diaspora. This reality established a boundary between the two groups of exiles, the new one having little reason to want to settle close to the old one. As a result, and with few exceptions, Iraqi migrants went where asylum regulations were most favourable.

An interesting new development in the 1990's was the pioneering of a Shi'a migration trend to the United States, with a concentration in places where Arab communities were already thriving. The pioneers came legally in 1992 through the US refugee resettlement quota from the Rafha camp in Saudi Arabia. Members of this first group had little scope to choose their resettlement country, but did exert choice as where in that country they were going to reside. This resulted in a clustering of Iraqi Shi'a in the town of Dearborne, Michigan, that was already host to a large and well organised Shi'a community that had fled Lebanon during the civil war that had affected their country. All through the 1990's, the US kept taking in Iraqi refugees resettled mainly from Saudi Arabia and from Jordan in lesser numbers. An influx of legal and illegal migrants followed on their footsteps. Having mainly transited Jordan and, later in that decade and in the early 2000s, Syria and Lebanon, some used family reunification schemes, while others arrived clandestinely after flying from the Middle East to connect with the Central American route alongside irregular migrants from Colombia and Mexico. Among this latter group, many did not apply for asylum once in the US, preferring to remain as illegal aliens or to find other ways to regularise their stay, for example through marriage within the community. At the beginning of the 2000s, it could already be said that Dearborne was host to an organised Iraqi Shi'a community, with cultural and religious institutions autonomous from those of the Lebanese community.

Even more telling was the case of the Assyrians who kept going to the United Kingdom, North America and Australia, legally when they could and clandestinely when there was no other way, thus following trends set by their ancestors had set at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century rather than targeting new asylum countries in Northern Europe where they had no relatives or community institutions.

To complete this sketch of Iraqi asylum migration over the last decade, consideration should be given to Australia that became a new destination for the Shi'a in the late 1990s, when they started following on the footsteps of the Assyrians. This happened after the EU had adopted border control policies that made the European route extremely dangerous and costly. To go to Australia, Assyrians had originally used family reunification or Church sponsorship schemes, while others had managed to get emigration visas based on their professional skills and some were granted places in special humanitarian programmes after 1991. The Shi'a were just as skilled, but it was too late when they turned to Australia: after the mid-1990s, the country stopped granting emigration visas to Iraqis. Those who were not deterred flew all the way from Jordan or Pakistan (after transiting Iran) to Malaysia or Indonesia that, at the time, did not request visas from nationals of Moslem countries. From Java, they would board fishermen boats and show up on the nearest Australian islands where they launched asylum claims. This time Shi'a were mixed with Assyrians that had not managed to migrate legally through the activation of family or religious ties. When a new government in Melbourne adopted stringent control at sea and other deterrence measures, several hundreds Iraqis were left stranded alongside Afghans in what were originally transit countries in South Eastern Asia, and that were not prepared to turn into asylum countries.

If all of the Iraqi migrants who settled in a Western country between 1991 and early 2003 do not qualify as refugees, there is little doubt that the overwhelming majority was absolutely ruling out returning under Saddam Hussein's rule. Acknowledging the particulars of their situation and of the dictatorial nature of the Iraqi regime, several countries granted those Iraqi asylum seekers that did not qualify as refugees a form or another of humanitarian asylum. In all cases, Western countries refrained from forcefully returning rejected Iraqis asylum seekers or clandestine migrants home, except in the case of those living in the areas under Kurdish rule and who were mainly Kurds. It was anyway technically impossible as no direct flight existed to Iraq under the embargo, but it was also ruled out on humanitarian grounds. Yet the recognition rate of Iraqi asylum seekers in Western states was only 44%, which left a majority in legal limbo and was the occasion for social networks to play a large integrating role.

### *II.2.b Global dispersal*

In 2002, just before the outbreak of the war in Iraq, UNHCR reports and statistics showed that Iraqis were scattered throughout the world: in the Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen), Asia (Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia), Europe (Baltic countries, Scandinavia, Hungary, Switzerland, Cyprus, EU countries), the American continent (Canada, USA, Mexico), all the way to the Pacific rim (Papua-New Guinea, Nauru, Australia, New Zealand) and Africa (Tunisia, Somalia, Kenya). This extreme dispersal, with volumes varying substantially from one country or region to the other, came as a result of the global domino effect of migration policies that was reinforced by more stringent border control and security measures adopted after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. While the overwhelming majority of migrants could not move further than regional host states, costs of irregular migration selected and sorted out other migrants all along the routes leading to Western states. A new trend that appeared in the early 2000s was that of asylum claims launched from countries bordering blocks of Western states, and the creation of new, albeit often temporary migrant communities in totally new social environments such as Nauru or Hungary. Another case was Mexico that, in 2000, started receiving asylum claims under the 1951 Geneva Convention as an effect of pressures by the USA and Canada in view of contain flows of asylum seekers. Several applications were subsequently filled by detained Iraqi Assyrians that were caught on their way to California.

Since the 1990s, the general trend in Western states has been towards containment of forced and involuntary migrants, and the shifting of responsibility onto nation with fewer resources in the immediate vicinity of blocks of wealthier industrialised states or in the regions of origin of asylum migrants. In these conditions, Iraqi migrants with no legal existence, sometimes held in detention, were likely to feel pressured to return home under unsafe conditions or to first transit countries if they could manage to. Many such returns took place, in particular from South-East Asia to Jordan.

In November 2001, finally responding to pressures from Australia that used the September 11<sup>th</sup> as a new argument "for fear of terrorist infiltration", Malaysia imposed visa restrictions on Iraqis, together with Afghans and Iranians in a step expected to cut the flow of irregular migrants transiting and using the services of people smugglers. Indonesia also tightened up border control measures, and is currently detaining several hundred Iraqis for illegal entry. An estimated 2,000 more are surviving clandestinely. Malaysia and Indonesia refuse to give Iraqis and other asylum migrants from the Middle East any status. A situation similar to that in Jordan has developed, with UNHCR and both Christian and Shi'a institutions playing roles in the survival attempts of Iraqis who are more at loss than even in a country totally unfamiliar to them. The major difference is that very little prospect exists for future migration but return to Iraq or to Jordan.

Australia has subcontracted Papua New Guinea and Nauru to take in asylum seekers while their claim is being processed in detention centres. Australia and New Zealand have agreed to accept those recognised but take only those who already have family members, i.e. women and children. In 2002, there were 400 Iraqis in the island states of Papua New Guinea and Nauru. No provision has been made for rejected asylum seekers.

At the external borders with Western Europe, in Russia, Ukraine, the Balkans, the Baltic countries, even further away in Armenia and Azerbaijan reports reveal the imprisonment of several dozen Iraqi asylum seekers for illegal entry. Only some of these countries are parties to the 1951 Geneva Convention generally with imperfect domestic legal provisions. More and more seek readmission agreements with their neighbours, leading to another type of domino effect and, ultimately, of *refoulement* by proxy.

At another level, in the post 11<sup>th</sup> September environment, resettling Iraqi refugees has not been an easy task for UNHCR. The US is the largest resettlement country in the world and suspended the system for several months, resuming it at a slower pace, especially for refugees from Islamic countries. This has in particular affected Iraqi refugees in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Generally, asylum is increasingly viewed as a vehicle through which terrorists and other undesirables might enter Western States. Responding to the attack of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, and abusively linking the issue of terrorism with that of the movement of refugees to the West, most Western states implemented a number of policy and legislative changes whose profound effects on the provision of protection for refugees are already felt. New anti-terrorist legislation made asylum seekers and irregular migrants from Islamic and Arab countries especially vulnerable to detention and expulsion.

## **Conclusion**

Iraqi emigration has been multi-polar, has taken place in stages, and has been multidirectional at all stages with the result that, just before the outbreak of the war in Spring 2003, the largest concentrations of Iraqis were in Iran, Jordan, Turkey, and Syria, all countries playing both long-term hosts and transit stages for migrants. The minority of Iraqis that had gone beyond the



Middle East was extremely dispersed geographically, with larger clusters in Western Europe, North America and the Pacific, and small communities in Central America, South East Asia, and Central and Eastern Europe (UNHCR 2003). Iraqi emigrants were living under a wide variety of statuses (from illegal alien to long-term resident or full-fledged refugee) that reflected host or emigration countries' legal provisions and policies more than they indicate the root cause(s) of an individual's emigration from Iraq.

Policy changes in certain Western countries redirected the flow of Iraqi migrants towards other close or distant prosperous destination countries, and/or stopped this flow at one or several transit stages along the route, usually less-prosperous states that then became more permanent stations and were faced with a policy challenge that they needed to meet by adopting new migration management measures. This sometimes redirected the flow of Iraqi migrants once again, or forced other types of sociological adaptation to the new situation, in particular the heavy reliance on those social networks that operate in the interstice of, or against the control measures adopted by states. The domino effect of migration and asylum policies has been well studied in Western, Central and Eastern Europe in the context of European integration and enlargement. If one acknowledges, alongside M.M. Kritz and H. Zlotnik (1992), that global interdependency of migration policies is the norm rather than the exception, then looking at the system of Iraqi exile migration allows for illustrating how the domino effect operates on a global scale.

Furthermore, the Iraqi case allows for checking recent theories of international migration according to which a particular migration trend gains a transnational dimension when it is based on social networks whose members are collectively able to transform local social assets into transnational ones. When this occurs, chain migration may continue even when changes affect the macro structure.

A particular attention has been given in this article to social networks based on religious or sectarian identities that may intersect with those based on ethnic and/or political identities for the simple reason that individuals have several social identities. It is of course not posited that each and every Iraqi migrant has relied on such (a) network(s) to undertake migration. A telling case is that of those Iraqis that have, consciously or not, disregarded their ethnic, religious, or sectarian affiliation in migration (despite the sometimes ascriptive character of these identities in the Iraqi and regional context), and have relied instead on family or professional connections to move along the route and settle in a destination country. Many have also responded very individually to successive contexts, taking decision along the route. Conversely, in order to reach their migration aims, some migrants, potential or already en route, have made a conscious choice of creating a network based on such ethnic or religious ties (including through conversion), or of connecting to an existing network, or of using certain resources in a network of which they were already members. Finally, other individuals had no choice for surviving but to rely on the resources provided by certain types of networks.

During the last 12 years of Saddam Hussein's rule, the sector of the Iraqi population most susceptible to emigrate durably was the relatively large middle class who was experiencing impoverishment and a severe limitation of public liberties, if not necessarily direct persecutions, and who could connect to the types of transnational networks described above. Some groups that were forcefully displaced by state policies were at a disadvantage, unable to access the networks that possessed the qualities and assets allowing for a rapid and far-ranging adaptation to the changing conditions. Unable to leave Iraq, they became IDPs.

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