

## New Trends in the Study of Migration

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### Summary

Transnationalism and diaspora have emerged in the last fifteen years as powerful new paradigms in understanding migrant networks, activities and patterns of life that encompass both their host and home societies. With migrants' lives cutting across national boundaries and bringing different societies into a single social field, migration is now better conceptualized in terms of continuous movement back and forward from the society of origin to the society of destination and beyond, whether by way of physical recurrent returns, or through the maintenance of symbolic, cultural and political ties. Even more central to the new understanding of migration is the notion of "simultaneity", which sheds light on how migrants, refugees and displaced populations engage *simultaneously* with the nation-building processes of two or more countries or communities

Transnationalism has operated as a theoretical device to challenge a "methodological nationalism" which tended to perceive, and therefore to reproduce, nation-states as the main socio-spatial contexts where economic, cultural, political and social processes would occur. Some scholars of migration believe that crisis of the nation-state, in cultural, economic and institutional terms, may be seen as both a cause and a consequence of transnational forms of lives. With more and more displaced people around the world holding dual or multiple citizenship, or partially accessing civil and social rights (less so political rights) without being nationals of the country, an era of post-citizenship or flexible citizenship is emerging. However, some scholarship has insisted on the persistence of the importance of the nation-state despite globalization and transnational migration. They point out that 'transnational social fields' could give birth to 'deterritorialised nation-states' that stretch beyond their geographic boundaries and in which '...the nation's people may live anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state.'

Within the Arab context, there is evidence of the historical role played by diasporas and migrants in the nation-building projects of their host countries and increasing attempts at incorporating the diasporas and reinforcing the links of the second and third generations to their home countries. Transnational migrants are now recognised and constructed as part and parcel of several nation-state building projects and Arab diasporas are actively participating in discussions and mobilisations around democratization and reforms in their countries of origin. They are thus becoming part of, and promoting, a transnational civil society or a transnational public sphere.

New topics in migration in the region focus on the fact that many of the migratory movements in the Middle East are not to Western countries, but rather are south – south and several of the Middle East countries are also becoming transit countries as gateways to Europe. Another phenomenon is the "feminization of migration" in some regions such as the Gulf, thus a new body of literature addresses migrant domestic workers in some Gulf countries and in Lebanon. A new literature on the social and political effects of return migration and emigration amongst the refugee Palestinian communities in Lebanon or in the West Bank is also emerging as well as the study of transnational networks amongst Palestinian entrepreneurs. Finally, attention is also being focused on the gendered nature of transnational networks, for example between Morocco and Europe, as well as marriage strategies amongst diaspora and refugee populations, as among the Sudanese in Cairo.

To summarize new migratory phenomena in the Arab countries, the author highlights the following points:

- Arab countries are often simultaneously emigration, immigration and transit countries,
- Arab countries are crosscut by different kinds of migrant populations which include: refugees, internally displaced, rural-urban migrants, transnational migrants, and domestic workers amongst others.

In the meantime, some common questions are emerging:

- Issues of citizenship in relation to migrants, refugees and diaspora seem to be relevant in all countries.
- The boundary between voluntary vs. forced migration is blurred with economic migrants being at the same time refugees and/or acquiring citizenship of their host countries on the one hand, and with asylum often being the only option available for prospective migrants, on the other.