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IRAQIS IN JORDAN SINCE 2003: WHAT SOCIO-POLITICAL STAKES?

Françoise de Bel-Air

CARIM Research Reports 2009/10

**Cooperation project on the social integration
of immigrants, migration, and the movement
of persons**

Co-financed by the European University Institute
and the European Union (AENEAS Programme)



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

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What Socio-Political Stakes?**

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CARIM
**EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION**
RESEARCH REPORT, CARIM-RR 2009/10
BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO DI FIESOLE (FI)

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Abstract

This research report describes the main features and social profile of the Iraqi community in Jordan, the various policies Jordan has formulated for them, and the evolution in popular debates targeting Iraqis. Policies and debates are analysed in the light of the socio-political challenges posed by the Iraqi presence in Jordan. Furthermore, socio-political challenges and opportunities which might be generated, either by the departure, or alternatively by the enduring presence of the post-2003 Iraqi "refugees" in Jordan are tackled.

Résumé

Ce papier met en exergue les caractéristiques principales et le profil social de la communauté irakienne en Jordanie, les politiques de l'Etat jordanien et l'évolution des débats populaires vis-à-vis des réfugiés irakiens. Les politiques et les débats sont analysés tout en prenant en considération les défis sociopolitiques qui se posent à la société et aux décideurs en Jordanie. L'auteur examine également les opportunités et les défis que le départ des réfugiés irakiens ou leur présence permanente pourrait éventuellement engendrer.

Introduction

The influx of Iraqi citizens into Jordan did not start in 2003. In fact, by the start of the US-led war on Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, Jordan was estimated to be already hosting between 50 000 and 300 000 Iraqi refugees, most of them without residency permits.¹ The 2003 war and its aftermath brought new waves of Iraqis to Jordan, following the pace of political developments in Iraq. The first came in 2003, with the American-led de-Baathification of the Iraqi government, the demobilization of the Iraqi military, and the shutting down of Iraq's state-owned industries: these combining with the rise of a widespread business in kidnapping. The second came as, in 2004, the US military began to attack and invade insurgent strongholds, for example the Sunni city of Falluja. The third came with the rise of a Sunni/Shia civil war and associated ethnic cleansing campaigns, which accelerated in February 2006, after the bombing of the Golden Dome Shiite shrine of Samarra by Sunni insurgents.² Their numbers increased steadily until 2006, when there were between 450 000 and 750 000 Iraqis in Jordan. Unofficial estimates of one million circulate among the population and in the press.

Such a number of newcomers (or the perception of such a number), the rhythm of their arrival, and their social, economic and political profile all pose a variety of problems to the resource-poor Kingdom. Seen from Jordan's point of view, the large number of Iraqis with associated pressure on resources and infrastructure has a specific impact within its post-rentier socio-political system. The forced nature of these migration waves also demands measures peculiar to a country that received massive waves of refugees from Palestine, whose ultimate fate in Jordan is still pending. The post-2003 influx of Iraqis and its impact on Jordan will thus be analysed from a socio-political point of view. Policies applied to those immigrants, public and popular discourses and debates tackling them will be read as political statements, sometimes bringing about contradictory views on Jordan's polity, state-society dynamics, regional and international role, i.e. on Jordan's social and political future.

After briefly describing the main features of the Iraqi community in Jordan, the various policies Jordan has formulated for them, the evolution in popular debates targeting Iraqis will be outlined. In a third section, policies and debates will be analysed in the light of the socio-political stakes posed by the Iraqi presence within Jordan. In a fourth, some hypotheses will be drawn, regarding further socio-political challenges and opportunities which might be generated, either by the departure, or alternatively by the enduring presence of the post-2003 Iraqi "refugees" in Jordan.

Immigration dynamics and social profile of Iraqis

The most widely used estimate for the number of Iraqis in Jordan is that released by UNHCR, which stands at 750 000 as of mid-2007. A survey conducted by the Norwegian institution Fafo, in partnership with UNFPA and Jordan's Department of Statistics gave a lower figure: 450 to 500 000.³ Throughout 2007 and after, several policy papers on Iraqis in Jordan were published, but a comprehensive picture of the community, as well as precise data on the dynamics of immigration are still lacking. The Fafo Survey, may be inaccurate in terms of the overall size of the community (it probably grossly underestimated the share of the poor and illegal Iraqis in Jordan). But it is the only source available for drawing some indicative features of the socio-economic profile and dynamics of

¹ No official figures were released by any stakeholders. The numbers quoted are guesstimates gathered from various sources. These Iraqis were victims of the political repression conducted throughout the 1990s against Shiites in Iraq, as well as the economic crises following the implementation of the embargo.

² Author Michael Schwartz (2008) identifies these three main overlapping waves of Iraqi displacement (IDPs as well as cross-border migrants) during the period following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. See also <http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/174892> (last accessed September 2008).

³ Fafo/ DoS/ UNFPA. *Iraqis in Jordan. Their Number and Characteristics*, Amman: 2007.

movements into Jordan. These features are important as they have a significant social and political impact on the receiving country and on the refugee community within the new context.

Data available from the sample survey conducted by Fafo suggest that most "refugees" arrived during 2006⁴: 32,8% of all respondents and 42% of those who arrived in 2003 and after. However, survey data analysis brings out three different profiles in the period from 2003 to mid-2007. The first 2003 wave of refugees, which immediately followed the dismissal of Saddam Hussein's regime and apparatus, is viewed as a relatively wealthy wave of individuals with high social capital. This perception is confirmed by the survey's data: half (48%) of the heads of households who arrived in Jordan during 2003 were classified in the "highest wealth" category at the time of the survey; moreover, 35% of these 2003 refugees were also citizens of another country besides Iraq, a feature that was negligible in other migration waves.⁵ The following wave (2004-2005) was characterized by the predominance of the very rich and the very poor among immigrant Iraqi heads of households. The most recent migrants (2006-2007) were increasingly from the low and medium wealth categories. This suggests that the first wave of migrants were those with high economic and social capital, easily transferable abroad. Later on, the attacks of the Coalition forces on so-called Sunni "strongholds", followed by sectarian violence targeting civilians, mainly involved capital-rich as well as capital-poor Iraqis, the latter having "nothing to lose" anymore in leaving Iraq. The last wave was probably composed of Iraqis with some capital their country that is though limited and not exportable. These refugees are the ones who have the most to lose in leaving Iraq, which explains why they waited longest before departure.⁶

Overall, the Fafo survey results indicate that Iraqi immigration was mainly one of families (two out of three Iraqi households have children under 18). One in five households is female-headed. 80% of Iraqi households settled in Amman. The overall profile of the Iraqi immigrants in Jordan is marked by the numeric domination of Sunni Muslims (67, 5% of the total amount respondents), over Shiites (16, 5%), Christians (Catholics and Orthodox: 11, 8) and Sabeans (2,5%). In absolute terms, Shiites came in increasing numbers after 2004. Iraqi adults who arrived in Jordan in 2003 and after also had a high level of education. At least 60% of the 2003 and the 2006-2007 migrants aged 16 and more have a university education; in the 2004-2005 wave 60% have secondary diploma education and beyond. However, this social capital remains underexploited due to regulations prevailing in Jordan: 65% of Iraqi households gain income from employment, half of them from self-employment. At the same time, however, three quarters of households rely on transferred income (42% on transfers from Iraq). Only 10% of households benefit from a property or interest income, i.e., having economic capital in Jordan and only 25% of them own the dwelling they resided in at the time of the survey (60% of the wealthiest category of Iraqi households).

All these elements suggest the extreme range of situations encountered among Iraqi households in Jordan. However, precariousness prevails: most households rent their dwellings and still depend on transfers from Iraq or on fragile incomes from employment in Jordan, often, as we shall see, illegal employment. Moreover, the survey puts the proportion of surveyed Iraqis without a valid residence permit at the time of the survey as low as 43%; Jordan's Interior Ministry, for its part, stated that

⁴ A figure actually contradicted by the balance of entries and exits recorded by the Public Security Department (not fully accessible to the public). PSD states that the highest net migration rates were reached in 2004-2005 (Fafo, 2007: 17). However, PSD claims can stem from its will to demonstrate the efficiency of new entry regulations implemented early 2006, aiming at notably limiting the number of entries.

⁵ See Fafo, 2007, respectively tables 1.9, p. 12 and 2.4, p. 32.

⁶ This process of phased, context-led patterns of escapes can be compared to that witnessed at the time of the first Gulf War (1990-92) when Palestinian "returnees" fled Kuwait for Jordan (Van Hear, N. "The Impact of the Involuntary Mass Return' to Jordan in the Wake of the Gulf Crisis", *International Migration Review*, vol. XXIX, n°2, 1994, pp. 352-374.).

360,000 or 72% of the half a million Iraqis in the Kingdom were probably without legal residency.⁷ Most Iraqis also suffered from the violence that pushed them out of Iraq: 50.2% of Iraqis in Jordan said they came to the Kingdom for security reasons and an additional 38% came for family reunion. The psychological toll of such circumstances, of arrival and of precariousness in the host country actually deepens the gap separating the very few Iraqis able to earn a decent living in Jordan from the bulk of destitute ones: a fact confirmed by a recent survey by the International Organisation of Migration.⁸

Policies

Policies applied to Iraqi migrants by the Jordanian authorities partly contributed to this state of affairs and shaped the diversity of socio-economic profiles. However, policy evolution also stemmed from uncontrollable external constraints.

Labeling Iraqis as non-refugees, fellow Arabs

One of the main features of Jordanian policy-making towards Iraqis in the Kingdom is precisely its adamant refusal to consider Iraqis on its soil as "refugees".⁹ In doing this, Jordan is going against the UN Agencies who want victims of the ongoing war and sectarian strife to find shelter.¹⁰ Jordan is neither a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, nor to its 1967 Protocol. However, it has signed a MoU with UNHCR, under which it agrees to admit asylum seekers, including undocumented entrants, and to respect UNHCR's refugee status determination (RSD). The memorandum also adopts the refugee definition contained in the UN Refugee Convention and forbids the *refoulement* of refugees and asylum seekers¹¹. Therefore, as stated in early 2007, by Naser Judeh, the then government spokesperson, "Iraqis are divided into categories such as guests, investors, refugees and some are residing here",¹² refugees being the incomers who registered with UNHCR, a mere 52,000 Iraqis by the end of 2007.¹³ The status of Iraqi migrants entering Jordan, even as a direct consequence of the Iraqi conflict, is thus overwhelmingly that of "guest" or "visitor". In the Arabic press, Iraqis are referred to as "the displaced" (*nazihîn*) from Iraq, persons temporary residing in Jordan, immigrants (*muhâjirîn*), for instance.

⁷ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). "Jordan: Iraqi students exempted from school fees", *IRIN*, 27 August 2008 [accessed 5 October 2008]

⁸ IOM. Assessment of the Psychosocial Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Jordan and Lebanon- Survey Report, IOM:Amman; Beirut, February 2008.

⁹ Mahasneh, S. "Judeh: Government Refuses to Abide by the Decisions of the "Commission" on the Recognition of Iraqis as Refugees"; *Al-Arab Al-Yaum*, 13/03/2007; Nimri, N. "Jordan maintains its refusal to consider Iraqis in the Kingdom as refugees", *Al-Ghad*, 15/4/2007.

¹⁰ UNHCR considers Iraqis from south and central Iraq meet the definition of prima facie refugees, (persons fleeing generalized violence and persecution), and it undertook to register them as such after 2003. Registration allows UNHCR to identify Iraqis in need of protection, offer assistance and vet them for the few resettlement opportunities available. However, the Jordanian government refused to accept the prima facie designation. Instead, it insisted on going back to the terms of a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding stating that persons registered with UNHCR, including Iraqis, would be designated as asylum seekers rather than given prima facie refugee status (Fagen, P. *Iraqi Refugees: Seeking Stability in Syria and Jordan*, Georgetown Institute for the Study of International Migration/ Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar: Center for International and Regional Studies, 2007, p. 15).

¹¹ See http://www.rsdwatch.org/index_files/Page917.htm

¹² Hindi, L. "Gov't Calls for International Conference to Discuss Iraqi Refugees", *Jordan Times*, January 23rd, 2007.

¹³ Including those registered as asylum seekers. Of these, UNHCR granted refugee status to nearly 8,100 Iraqis and referred them for resettlement, of whom 1,600 departed for resettlement countries (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008 - Jordan*, 19 June 2008).

Moreover, in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the media emphasized historical and societal/ tribal proximity between Jordanian and Iraqi people.¹⁴ The Hashemite rulers' political philosophy is indeed characterized by its Pan-Arabist claims, sustained by openness to Arab migrants at the borders. At the Emirate of Transjordan's establishment in 1921, the substratum of Bedouin populations, Arab and Caucasian villagers aggregated with traders, artisans, bureaucrats and soldiers from Hedjaz, Syria and Palestine. Unending regional crises then channelled waves of forced migrants towards Jordan, the 1948 Palestinian refugees, the displaced of 1967 and the 1991 Gulf War returnees from Kuwait, as well as refugees of other conflicts including Lebanon after 1975 and Iraq since 1991 and, more recently, in 2003. This Pan-Arabic stand is, to a certain extent, shared by parts of the population, who did support the opening of the borders to the Iraqis for reasons of Arab solidarity, at the very beginning of the exodus.

Policies governing entry, sojourn and return

In spite of this Pan-Arabist stance, Jordan closed its borders against a massive flow of refugees on the eve of the March 2003 American-led attack on Baghdad, fearing a repeat of the 1991 Gulf War which forced more than 1 million refugees into the Kingdom.¹⁵ Therefore, "as the United States invaded Iraq, Jordan prepared to assist up to 100,000 arrivals—Iraqi refugees and third-country nationals—fleeing the hostilities. [...] With a guarantee from the UN that the government would not have to grant asylum to new arrivals, Jordan and UNHCR set up two temporary transit camps near the town of Ruweishid—approximately 70 km from the Iraqi border—to process mostly Asian workers transiting through the country—and Iraqis, who do not require visas to enter Jordan. Authorities opened an additional camp in the no-man's land between the two countries to conduct security clearances of others not allowed to enter the country, including those without transit visas or valid travel documents. Jordan agreed to allow the refugees temporary shelter while UNHCR coordinated repatriation or resettlement options."¹⁶

Standard immigration law applying to Iraqi temporary visitors first governed the entry and settlement of these immigrants. No stream of dispossessed Iraqis was registered. Instead, the first arrivals came at only a moderate pace. Some were officials or beneficiaries of the former regime,¹⁷ others were business people bringing funds with them or those who had investments or bank accounts in Jordan dating back to before the war. Most immigrants entered as "guests". Rich Iraqis could get legal residency permits by depositing between 70 000 and 150 000 US\$ in a Jordanian bank, by investing or buying property. After registering a business with the Ministry of Commerce, annual residency was automatically granted under the category of "investor". Purchase of Jordanian limited-duration passports was also made possible for equivalent amounts. Some "professional" residency documents were also issued to highly qualified Iraqi professionals, for instance university professors or medical doctors. Some of the latter were even registered in the doctors' professional association.

¹⁴ For example, Al-Khalidi, S. "Iraqi Influx Drives Economic Boom", *Jordan Times*, March 8, 2005 and Abu 'Aridha, M. "Iraqis in Jordan: Characteristics of a Stable Social Fabric, open [on others]", *Al Arab Al Yaum*, 25 February 2006.

¹⁵ Uprooted from Kuwait, Iraq and other countries in the region in the wake of the first Gulf War, 1990-1991. Estimates suggest that most of these refugees were Egyptians, with other migrants from Yemen, Sudan and various Southeast Asian countries, resettled within weeks in their home countries. However, 300,000 immigrants originating from Palestine and bearing Jordanian nationality had to be resettled in Jordan in the aftermath of the crisis (Van Hear, N. *New Diasporas. The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrants Communities*, London: UCL, 1998).

¹⁶ United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey 2004 - Jordan*, 25 May 2004. Online UNHCR Refworld, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/40b4593ec.html> [last accessed 3 October 2008]

¹⁷ For instance, two of Saddam Hussein's daughters and members of the families of other dignitaries of the former regime sought shelter in the Kingdom.

Measures were regularly taken to facilitate border-crossing procedures. Moreover, law enforcement towards controlling the legality of sojourn in general was weak for the bulk of the immigrants, those living off their savings and thus not fitting the category targeted by capital-attracting measures. Though immigration rules stipulate that whoever is caught without a legal permit should be deported on the spot, Ministry of the Interior officials and Iraqi residents claim that police refrained from deporting Iraqis out of humanitarian concerns.¹⁸ A Human Rights Watch Report confirms this assertion: "[u]ntil November 2005 the Jordanian government and Jordanian law enforcement officials had demonstrated considerable leniency in enforcing immigration laws, usually deporting Iraqis only if they violated other laws".¹⁹ Iraqis whose residency permit or visa had expired were thus tacitly allowed to remain in the country.

The suicide attacks of November 9 (11/9), 2005 conducted by three Iraqis who killed 60 people by detonating themselves in three hotels in Amman, sparked a complete turnaround. Popular perception of Iraqis in Jordan shifted drastically and measures were taken against the overwhelmingly illegal Iraqi presence, though the measures were not widely publicized and were denied in official speeches.

Measures against the entry and sojourn of Iraqis were adopted from January 2, 2006 onwards, escalating from technical²⁰ to entry-barring and even deportation measures. Jordan started controlling the entry of Iraqis at the border at al-Karama, the only land crossing between Iraq and Jordan. Similar measures were also conducted at Queen Alia Airport, where candidates were turned away or where endless procedures were imposed. Men between 18 and 35 years of age were barred from entering the country and, in some cases, entire families: witnesses attested that decisions solely depended on the say of individual customs officers. However, officials systematically denied the containment of Iraqis²¹ and the construction of facilities at the Al-Karama land border post was completed, aiming officially at a better response to increasing flows of refugees.²² Later, throughout 2007, discussions continued between Amman and Baghdad in order for a bilateral visa system to be set up, meaning that Iraqi border-crossers would need a visa obtained before departure from Jordanian diplomatic missions in Baghdad or elsewhere. UNHCR expressed its strong opposition to the project, though Jordan claimed it was a response to requests from the Iraqi government so as to regulate the entry of Iraqi citizens into Jordan in order to avoid these entrants being turned away.²³ Finally, in January 2008, both governments agreed upon a new visa processing system: as of May 1, international courier TNT Post was granted accreditation to centralise visa applications from Iraqi citizens through its 13 offices (in each of Iraq's governorates), to process them and to forward them to the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior for a decision.²⁴ The agreement is said to include special directives on dealing with humanitarian cases and expediting application processing.²⁵ However, as a pre-condition for residency approval, every candidate is now required to deposit \$150,000 in a bank "to ensure that the applicant

¹⁸ IRIN. "Jordan: Iraqi Government Calls for Refugee Visa Fine Waiver", *IRIN-ME*, February 7th, 2008.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch. *"The Silent Treatment" Fleeing Iraq, Surviving in Jordan*, Volume 18, No. 10(E), November 2006, chap. III.

²⁰ Prohibition of vehicles with Iraqi license plates from entering the country, unless the owner deposits funds into a trust equal to the value of the car (mentioned in Sinner, J. "Iraqis Find Travel to Jordan Increasingly Frustrating", *Washington Post*, January 17, 2006). Later, in May 2007, Iraqis wanting to enter Jordan were requested to hold a new model of electronically readable passports ("G" series, instead of the old "S" series, hand-written passports introduced after March 2003 and easily forgeable) made available in Iraq only two months before, thus difficult to obtain.

²¹ See speeches by Naser Judeh, speaker of the government.

²² See "Announcement of Completion of Zone for Travellers and Merchants' Exchange by the End of Next July", *Al Arab Al-Yaum*, June 24th, 2006.

²³ Hindi, L. "Iraqis will Need Visa to Enter Jordan – Gov't", *Jordan Times*, September 3rd, 2007.

²⁴ The company charges 15,000 Iraqi dinars (12.5\$) for each applicant, who should receive a receipt, the application's registration number and a date to check on the result for the application he or she made from the company ("New system to aid visa processing for Iraqis", *Jordan Times*, April 10th, 2008).

²⁵ However, the overall process is said to be extremely difficult, as documents required include: passports, nationality proof.

can take care of himself while staying in the Kingdom". Iraqi diplomats and official delegates, patients, the elderly and students studying in Jordanian universities and others guaranteed by the Iraqi embassy are excluded from this requirement.²⁶

As for sojourners, after the 2005 bombings, Jordan appears to have begun deporting visa "overstayers", those who were barred from renewing their residency papers by fear or by lack of the financial means necessary to pay the fines (conventionally 1,5JD, approx. 2\$ per day). Many Iraqis were thus slipping into clandestinity *en masse*.²⁷ In most cases however, the persons facing deportation were allowed to go to Syria or Yemen instead of Iraq, two countries which at the time did not require visas from Arabs.²⁸ In February 2008, Jordan announced the second amnesty since December 2005. During a one-month period between 17 February-17 March 2008,²⁹ later extended until May, visa fines were to be waived on illegal Iraqi residents wishing to return home, and reduced by 50 percent for those wishing to remain in the Kingdom. However, according to the Interior Minister, 12,000 Iraqis stayed and benefited from the exemption decision while only 3,000 left the country.³⁰

As a matter of fact, the Iraqi authorities had changed policy as of mid-2007 and started strongly advocating the return of expatriates from neighbouring host countries. They even launched incentives, claiming violence was notably decreasing. In early September 2008, 500 to 600 Iraqis were scheduled to fly from Amman, after the Iraqi authorities had provided free flights and financial incentives for resettlement back in Iraq.³¹ Jordan, however, claims that return migrants are volunteers and that it does not exert any pressure on its guests to leave the Kingdom

Policies and measures affecting Iraqi's living conditions in Jordan

As noted above, Iraqis falling into the "investors" category were privileged by the Jordanian authorities. Several measures facilitated the conduct of their affairs, as the flow of Iraqi capital into Jordan. The 1995 Investment Promotion Law was amended to include exemptions from custom duties and income tax, and allowed unlimited transfer of capital. King Abdullah himself, "in a bid to woo Iraqi businesses ready to relocate in Jordan", offered prominent Iraqi businesspersons and company owners tax incentives.³² Business partnership and investments with local partners, purchase of lands and housing by non-Jordanians were also facilitated.³³ Wealthy investors, though, had already fully benefited from capital-attracting measures and preferential administrative treatment, in contrast to most of their fellow compatriots, who could not aspire to be "investors".

As noted above, Jordan prevents foreign nationals categorized as "visitors" or as "refugees" from having a professional activity. As most Iraqis fall within the first category (that of "guests"), their situation is worsening due to their prolonged displacement, and the progressive exhaustion of savings. Many Iraqis are thus forced to work illegally and become vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and frustrations, without being able to fully provide for their basic needs. Tightened residency rules after

²⁶ Hazaimh, H. "Turnout to Benefit from Overstay Fines Waiver 'Disappointing'", *Jordan Times*, July 20th, 2008.

²⁷ Here again, authorities publicly denied any change in the accommodation of Iraqis in Jordan (Abu Sbih, M. "Ministry of the Interior: No changes in the sojourn of Iraqis in Jordan", *Al-Ghad*, 07/02/07.

²⁸ Syria started imposing visas on Iraqi incomers on October 1st, 2007.

²⁹ IRIN. "Jordan: Visa fine waiver not enough to lure Iraqis home", *IRIN-ME*, February 21st, 2008.

³⁰ Hazaimh, H. "Turnout to benefit from overstay fines waiver 'disappointing'", *Jordan Times*, July 20th, 2008.

³¹ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), "Iraq-Jordan: Government plans to facilitate repatriation", *IRIN*, 4 September 2008.

³² Al-Khalildi, S. "Iraqi investors expand business from Jordan", *Reuters*, May 3rd, 2005.

³³ Even if, following the 2005' attacks, some measures were envisaged to restrict Iraqis' entitlements in Jordan, such as preventing them from purchasing land and housing properties (Mahdi, O. "Jordan Stops the Entry of Iraqis and will Prevent them Owning of Properties", *Elaph*, 21/03/2007). This measure was not passed.

2006 and increased controls on work sites also affected Iraqis as illegal migrants, thus further isolating them socially.

Free primary schooling is a privilege guaranteed by the 1952 Constitution to nationals only. Moreover, Iraqi children could only attend government schools if the family had a residency permit. They would otherwise have to be enrolled in private schools, which became increasingly expensive for families suffering progressive impoverishment.³⁴ In August 2007, Jordan pledged to drop the residency requirement and offered to integrate up to 50 000 Iraqi children in its overcrowded public schools.³⁵ However, enrolment figures released by the Jordanian Education Ministry in August 2007 reported a lower-than-expected figure of 24 000 new Iraqi nationals registered for the school-year 2007-2008, added to the 18-19 000 Iraqi pupils who had already enrolled in the previous year. And this, in spite of the fact that UN estimates of undocumented Iraqi schoolchildren were revised up to a quarter of a million.³⁶ Persisting fear of deportation and Iraqi families' dependency on their children's labour are among the reasons given to explain this low enrolment rate. However, on August 26, 2008 Jordan's Ministry of Education waived annual fees in state-owned schools for Iraqi students, whatever their residency status, "to help them cope with rising living costs", after the government cancelled school fees for Jordanians in state schools in 2008-2009. Iraqi and Jordanian students will also be covered by the School Nutrition Programme, which provides daily nutrition to students across the Kingdom.³⁷

Regarding access to health services, all foreign nationals in Jordan, including refugees and asylum seekers regardless of their legal status, had access to Jordan's public health system at rates subsidized by the Government (60% of the cost was covered). In November 2007, UNHCR and Jordan signed an agreement granting Iraqis access at the rate for uninsured Jordanians (i.e., 70%).³⁸ However, poor migrants cannot afford hospital fees; they fear deportation if they cannot produce residency papers at public health facilities and suffer from bad quality of care, due to overcrowded infrastructures. Therefore, provision of health care to impoverished Iraqis is increasingly shared with the private sector or the initiative of local and international NGOs,³⁹ though under tight control from the Jordanian authorities.

More generally, indeed, alongside rejecting the labelling of Iraqis as *prima facie* refugees, the Government remains reluctant to allow assistance programmes exclusively for Iraqis, which would implicitly acknowledge the existence of a refugee category within the population.⁴⁰ Therefore, the

³⁴ Jordan allowed enrollment in Jordanian schools only to children of legally resident Iraqi asylum seekers. A royal decree issued in 1998 allowed children of undocumented migrants to enroll in schools, but required a certificate from their previous school. Few asylum seekers could produce such certificates, as they often left Iraq in emergency conditions.

³⁵ At the international conference of countries neighboring Iraq held in Amman on July 26th, 2007.

³⁶ Hindi, L. "250,000 School-Age Iraqis in Jordan - UN Agency", *Jordan Times*, August 22nd, 2008, where UNHCR official expressed the view that half of Iraqi migrants to Jordan were believed to be children, ranging from 250,000 to even 375,000 persons, out of 750,000 Iraqis in total.

³⁷ IRIN. "Jordan: Iraqi Students Exempted from School Fees", *IRIN*, 27 August 2008.

³⁸ United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008 - Jordan*, 19 June 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/485f50dcc.html>.

³⁹ Dajani, D. "Jabal Taj Clinic to Provide Free Healthcare to Iraqis", *Jordan Times*, March 2nd, 2008. See IOM. *Assessment of the Psychosocial Needs of Iraqis Displaced in Jordan and Lebanon- Survey Report*, IOM: Amman; Beirut, February 2008; Duncan, J./ Schiesher, D./ Khalil, A. *Iraqi Asylum Seekers in Jordan. A Report of the ICMC-USCCB Mission to Assess the Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum Seekers in Jordan*, International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)/ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, December 2007; Frey, V./ Galib, L./ Gavliniski, D./ Ryan, M./ Stivers, E. *Beyond Meeting the Needs: Displaced Iraqis and Sustainability in a Secure Jordan*, International Economic Development Program, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan, April 6, 2008, p. 8-10 for comprehensive accounts of NGOs involved in the provision of services to Iraqis.

⁴⁰ Also, "[t]he worry is that assistance to Iraqis could give rise to parallel structures or programs that are not already Jordanian priorities, or to activities managed by non-Jordanian organizations" (Fagen, 2007: 11).

government has to pre-approve assistance projects for Iraqi refugees⁴¹ and make sure that these serve poor Jordanian communities as well.

Last yet not least, it is worth noting that no precise evidence of policies of selective deportation measures targeting Shiites could be brought to light, in spite of such claims among refugees.⁴² Jordan's official stance on the matter is as follows: "Nasser Joudeh, a Jordanian government spokesman, insisted that Jordan did not exclude Iraqis except on security grounds, saying: "We don't have a Sunni-Shia problem."⁴³

Playing with numbers?

This brings us to the issue of numbers. Indeed, cutting through the issue of Iraqis' social, economic and also political and cultural impact, there is the question of how many Iraqis there actually are. It is noteworthy that Jordan did not publicly release any figures based on border movements, which were no longer broken down by nationality in published statistical records after mid-July 2005. Conceiving and organising a survey operation, out of which estimates of the size of the Iraqi community were to be drawn, took several months. UNHCR offered to conduct a survey on Iraqis in Jordan in partnership with the Jordanian authorities, who turned down the agency's proposition.⁴⁴ Jordan finally agreed to work with Fafo at providing estimates, after a small-scale survey was conducted in order to gather data on the structure of the community and its needs.

Sources for drawing a reasonably accurate picture of the size, demographic and socio-economic characteristics and evolution of the Iraqi community in Jordan are scarce. First, the last census in Jordan was carried out in October 2004. This implies that a large proportion of the post-2003 Iraqi refugees has not yet been counted; moreover, the number of Iraqi nationals reported at the time of the census (40,084)⁴⁵ is clearly too low. Second, the Public Security Directorate (PSD) publishes the records of entries and exits at the borders. However, they lose significance when combined with flawed stock (censuses) data: the balance of Iraqi citizens who entered and left Jordan from 1994 (the year of the previous census) until mid-2005⁴⁶ gives a mere estimate of 193,268 Iraqis in Jordan at that date.⁴⁷ The PSD provided a much higher estimate of 547 000 Iraqi nationals having entered and left Jordan from March 1990 to March 2007⁴⁸. However, this figure cannot be taken as reliable either, as entries are always recorded more accurately than exits. Fafo thus discarded the figure, but its own counter-estimate of 450 to 500 000 Iraqi migrants in Jordan as of mid-2007 also raises questions. The first estimate the team (Fafo and DoS) came up with was 161 000, "based on interviews in nearly 1000 sample clusters and depending on Iraqis identifying themselves as Iraqi nationals" (Fafo, 2007: 7). However, Fafo acknowledged that as Iraqis often reside in Jordan without legal status, then they would have been reluctant to identify themselves to survey takers. Fafo therefore used data sets of

⁴¹ "Some non-governmental organizations reported that the Ministry of Social Development made the approval and registration processes difficult", United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. *World Refugee Survey 2008 - Jordan*, 19 June 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/485f50dcc.html>.

⁴² Fattah, H. "The Reach of War; Uneasy Exiles Await Those Who Flee the Chaos in Iraq", *New York Times*, December 8th, 2006. This article is also quoted in Hodson, N. "Iraqis in Jordan: Cause for Concern in a Pivotal State", *Research Note n° 13*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 2007.

⁴³ Quoted in Farrell, S./ Blanford, N. "Religious Split could Set Region on Fire", *The Times Online*, December 8, 2006.

⁴⁴ Jordanian Interior Minister, quoted in Hindi, L. "Gov't Calls for International Conference to Discuss Iraqi Refugees", *Jordan Times*, January 23rd, 2007.

⁴⁵ HKJ/ DoS. *Main Results- Population and Housing Census 2004*, Amman: DoS, Sept. 2006, Vol. 4, table 7.1.

⁴⁶ Data on foreign nationals' entries and exits at borders broken down by nationality were no longer published after July 2005.

⁴⁷ Personal calculation: the balance of Iraqi nationals having entered and exited Jordan between the two dates has been added to the amount of Iraqis counted in the October 1994 census (24,501), here again grossly underestimated.

⁴⁸ Fafo *et al.*, 2007: 7.

phone subscribers registered by nationality and came up with an estimate of 481 000 Iraqis in Jordan. However, among many problems posed by the method, the team considered this estimate unreliable, arguing that the immigrants' intended duration of stay in Jordan was biased. Therefore, it settled on an estimate of the size of the Iraqi community in Jordan ranging between 450 000- 500 000.⁴⁹

Playing with the numbers of Iraqis thus serves the purpose of blurring their actual presence and, therefore, undermining their social and political weight in the country; at the same time it gives leeway for further policy change. Indeed, by acknowledging so openly the constructed feature of this estimate the general population continued to believe that the true number of Iraqi migrants was overwhelming (figures of up to 1 million are commonly mentioned). Second, one can hypothesise that a low estimate is a message addressed to Iraq as much as to the Jordan-based Iraqi community, a message reaffirming that Jordan will run the affairs of Iraqi migrants on its own soil.

To sum-up, Iraqis in Jordan seem to be dealt with according to the terms of two contradictory sets of policies. On the one hand, the heritage of Arab nationalism and Jordan's "moral", political and historical stance in welcoming Arab forced migrants encourages the Kingdom in opening its borders to Iraqis and durably accommodating them. On the other hand, Iraqis are welcomed and have free access to resources available in Jordan as long as they are wealthy enough to be self-sufficient or, better still, investors. Otherwise, even though some suggest a pattern of the progressive extension of Iraqi migrants' entitlements to services, neither is a material incentive given for their long-term settlement, nor are Iraqis entitled to social visibility, nor, indeed, any claims on their host country. However, the Jordanian authorities do not go as far as to force or even to encourage returns to Iraq. Policies conducted towards Iraqis in Jordan could be hence described as some kind of "segmented assimilation"⁵⁰ favouring capital-rich expatriates, while tolerating the rest of Iraqi migrants.

The design and implementation of policies actually seeks to channel and control the deep economic, social and political effects that successive waves of Iraqis to Jordan have exerted on Jordan since March 2003. We now explore the consequences of the Iraqi influx and the socio-political background and its interaction with the conception and evolution of the policies applied to Iraqi migrants in Jordan.

Socio-political stakes and dynamics affecting policies and public debates

Economic concerns, State-society and international relationships

Whether Iraqis have produced wealth and benefited Jordan is widely debated. No significant Iraqi investments in Amman's stock market (shareholding companies) were registered. However, Iraqi investments in real estate have enriched Jordanian landowners: prices of lands, for instance, increased by 200 or even 300% in certain areas of the capital. Iraqis' contribution to the capital of Jordanian companies was also marked.⁵¹ Iraqi investments in private businesses became a visible feature in the public space. Branches or replicas of businesses transplanted from Iraq opened in Amman, new commercial and leisure facilities were revived or created⁵² to satisfy Iraqi demands; infrastructures

⁴⁹"Given the major discrepancies in figures the Jordanian government's technical team was tasked with reconciling the various and contradictory estimates of the size of the Iraqi community and has concluded that the number of Iraqis in Jordan is estimated at 450,000- 500,000." (Fafo *et al.*, 2007: 8).

⁵⁰ A term coined by American scholar and migration specialist Alejandro Portes.

⁵¹ It doubled for instance between 2003 and 2004 (see Nueimat, A. *The Iraqi Status and its Effects on the Jordanian Economy*, Amman: Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung and Royal Scientific Society (RSS), June 2005 (in Arabic), p. 37/ p. 188.

⁵² For instance, "According to the Jordan Restaurants Association, there are 14 rated Iraqi restaurants in Amman alone, ranging from 1-4 stars, all registered within the last few years. This number, however, does not include the scores of late-night takeaway stands that have spread in various neighbourhoods in the capital and other towns" Luck, T. "Homesick Iraqis Reminisce about Ramadans Past, Favourite Cuisine", *Jordan Times*, September 29th, 2008.

developed notably (transportation, tourism, media...), newly setup or through shares purchased in prominent Jordanian companies. The construction boom stimulated growth among related economic sectors⁵³. However, a bulk of Iraqi money went on the consumption market; ostentatious display of wealth effectively characterized the first waves of immigrants. Inflation rose from 1.6% in 2003 to 6.5% in 2006, coinciding with the Iraqi influx even if economists claim that immigrants are not directly linked to this hike.⁵⁴

As Iraqis are mainly concentrated in Amman and Zarqa, locals are prone to blame them for the soaring of prices and even shortages of natural resources and housing, deteriorating public services and infrastructure, not to mention increased traffic.

In Jordan, economics is a politically sensitive matter, as from the 1930s the regime historically built its State-society relationships around client links, on the basis of "allegiance for food."⁵⁵ Redistribution in terms of commodities and access to social infrastructure was financed by external revenue stemming from wealthy Arab countries (development aid and financial compensation granted to every country bordering Israel), which dried up at the time of the first Gulf War. Structural Adjustment Programmes negotiated with the IMF and the World Bank at the end of the 1980s and economic deregulation measures took off dramatically after King Abdullah II's access to power. Economic reform led to the end of subsidies, cuts in public expenditures and "rationalising" in the public sector. It thus hit hard regions and social groups dependant on state assistance.⁵⁶ Moreover, these measures were interpreted in political terms as the regime foresaking the population. The progressive increase in direct and indirect levies and taxation, as well as the deterioration in public services have taken their political toll since the early 1990s. Lastly, Jordan is a country with few natural resources (water, hydrocarbons, arable lands). Privatisation of water supply services, a consequence of structural adjustment, disruptions of the oil supply from Iraq due to regime-change, all encouraged citizens to see the paucity of natural resources in their own land, resources that had been seen as the right of politically-compliant citizens.

Therefore, inflation, pressure on infrastructure, services, facilities, as well as competition between Iraqis and nationals for access to the labour market have had an impact in the political world. Information on Iraqi immigrants first focussed on their sizeable capital input and real estate purchases as noted above.⁵⁷ Since early 2006 however, the press is full of the plight of Jordanians struggling with poverty and prices hikes. We hear of Jordanians having to postpone purchase projects or even their marriage (i.e. social advancement) because they are not able to afford housing or because of the collapse in salaries for unskilled, daily labour. As a matter of fact, Iraqi workers seem to be favoured by employers. This is because they are in the work market illegally and therefore they are unable to require the minimum standards of payment. Immigration control being a legitimacy test in which the government should demonstrate its capacity as a security provider for citizens,⁵⁸ the (perceived) pressure of Iraqi migrants on a fragile economy and scarce natural resources reflects badly on a regime already politically-challenged. As noted above, the economy is increasingly deregulated and public expression is increasingly controlled because of the unstable political context.

⁵³ Kilani, S./ Taher, Gh. "For Better or for Worse", *Jordan Business*, November 2006, pp. 64-68.

⁵⁴ See supra, p. 26.

⁵⁵ The mainly rural regions in the south and, to a lesser extent, the east of Jordan have been tied to the Hashemite regime by a social contract, in which allegiance is offered in return for protection (see Tell, T. (Ed.). *The Resilience of the Hashemite Rule: Politics and the State in Jordan, 1946-67*, Amman: CERMOC, Les Cahiers du CERMOC n°25, 2001).

⁵⁶ For details on the political economy of Jordan, see Knowles, 2005 and Wils, 2003.

⁵⁷ One of the very few discordant voices emphasizing the positive impact of Iraqis on Jordan's economy was Jordanian economist A. Nueimat (2005).

⁵⁸ Boswell, C. "Theorizing Migration Policy: Is There a Third Way?", *International Migration Review (IMR)*, Volume 41, Number 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 75-100.

During 2006, Jordan also "woke up" to the reality of the growing number of poor among the Iraqi refugees there. As we noted in part one, the Fafo study suggests that many immigrants who entered Jordan after 2003 were suffering from poverty as of mid-2007, having either entered with fewer assets than the previous wave or having exhausted their savings due to longer than expected expatriation. Beyond the human drama that it represents, this impoverishment has had a further impact on state-society links within Jordan. The characteristics of Jordan's political economy mentioned above charges poverty politically. Indeed, acknowledging the existence of poverty in some sectors of the population stigmatizes the regime for political marginalisation of the communities labelled as poor; but it also, at the same time, and this is admittedly paradoxical, designates those communities as potential benefactors, thus placing them within the network of patronage.⁵⁹ Consequently, shedding light on the increasing poverty of Iraqis in Jordan first puts this group in competition with the Jordanian poor for aid. Second, it becomes increasingly difficult for the government to defend its open-door policy to Iraqis and, later on, their accommodation as mostly illegal and poor immigrants, which makes them appear as an economic burden. Emphasizing money and investment flows brought along by rich Iraqis was less politically hazardous. The specificity of Jordan's political and economic system can explain, therefore, the apparent reluctance of the Jordanian authorities to acknowledge the existence of poverty and social ailments within the Iraqi migrant community, poverty and ailments, which numerous reports and foreign NGOs were already highlighting by late 2006. Obstacles encountered by social workers targeting this community and the obligation to extend services to the Jordanian poor also find their political logic, though not their justification.

Moreover, acknowledging the existence of poverty among Iraqis attracts international and foreign NGO involvement. It also justifies the growing interventionist attempts from international or foreign stakeholders in the field of migration management and human rights protection. As authors and practitioners regularly place extreme poverty high among the criteria of refugee status definition, Jordan is increasingly pressurized by international agencies to consider Iraqis on its soil as "refugees", which would undermine its decision-making power towards migrants and possibly awaken political reactions among Jordanians. Therefore, granting service provision to Iraqis while tightly monitoring it and, especially, its extension to local deprived communities is recognized by Government of Jordan as "in line with both its moral responsibilities and its own self-interest of promoting societal stability."⁶⁰

Multidimensional social alienation: a "society within society"?

Iraqis, by their sheer demographic weight, have contributed to accentuate the social inequalities already present in the country. Rich Iraqis first swell the ranks of the transnational business elite attracted by Jordan as a regional economic hub, after the coming to power of King Abdullah II. Extreme wealth made an impression on Jordanians, especially as the Iraqi upper class displayed ostentatious spending in terms of consumption items, housing and leisure. Later, as the Iraqi middle class was running out of savings in the Kingdom or were pushed into Jordan after losing its assets and belongings in Iraq, poverty and its consequences (child labour, begging, peddling, selling of personal belongings in markets, prostitution) increased in public spaces. Jordan that has already been suffering the fading away of its own middle class since the economic crisis of the late 1980s, has become more polarized around extreme poverty on the one hand, and extreme wealth, on the other.

However, what mostly characterizes Iraqi migrants is the fact that they have not merged into Amman's social fabric, living side by side with other local communities.⁶¹ It is worth noting that they

⁵⁹ De Bel-Air, F. "Defining and Measuring Poverty, Making up Society. Around the use of the Human Development Concept and Index in Jordan", forthcoming in: Al Hussein, J./ Williamson, W. (eds). *The Management of Poverty in Jordan. From Measurement to Alleviation*, Beirut: IFPO.

⁶⁰ Frey et. al, 2008, p. 4.

⁶¹ Some high-flying transnational business people, who already had investments and properties in Jordan before 2003, may have joined previously-built networks. However, in general, the social structure in Amman remains very fragmented. Due

have not been settled in camps, a specific space of confinement and segregation from the host society, yet, also a space of "formulating new identities as well as places from which to organize politically [...]"⁶². Rather, Iraqis, whether wealthy or not, seem to have "filled gaps" in the urban fabric everywhere for housing and estate vacancies were available throughout the town, according to their socio-economic profile. They concentrated in higher numbers where the fabric was loose (i.e., where housing vacancies and building lands was abundant), hence making their presence more "visible" in these areas, yet scattering it across the various socio-economic clusters in town. New businesses, restaurants and catering ventures, such as were described above, acted as meeting points for expatriates; buoyant idiosyncratic cultural and artistic expression emerged. Iraqis also displayed a use of public space that was more intense than that typical of most Jordanians. Yet, in the immediate aftermath of the post-2003 exodus, a genuine feeling of solidarity and common Arab identity with Iraqi newcomers dulled social fears. As noted above, the Iraqi's relative wealth seen in the establishment of new businesses and the perceived economic benefits for the country inclined most Jordanians to give the newcomers the benefit of the doubt.

However, as noted before, the bombings of November 2005 marked the turning point in this generally neutral-positive attitude towards Iraqis. The event triggered an upsurge of Jordanian nationalist feeling which lasted for several months and which ostracized Iraqis. From then on, the Iraqi imprint on the social and physical space of Amman, their cultural input and habits and, their clustering in Iraqi "enclaves" (so-called "Little Iraq") started being noted. The presence of Iraqi communities throughout the capital, now considered alien, thus became a matter of popular concern and a matter of sovereignty.⁶³ The progressive closing of Jordan's borders to Iraqis (until the implementation of the visa system mid-2008) enjoyed popular support. The issue of counting Iraqis "to allay fears" also emerged in this context and the implementation of the Fafo survey in May 2007 was vested with this mission.⁶⁴

In such a context, the way in which Iraqis were seen as potential generators of violence in Jordan rapidly took on a sectarian dimension. The war between Israel and Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon, in the summer of 2006, triggered popular enthusiasm for the latter and some (unknown amounts of) conversions of Sunnis to Shiism were reported, in Jordan as in other countries of the region. Despite its acknowledged religious tolerance for other sects and faiths, the Hashemite dynasty supports and promotes mainstream Sunni Islam, as a member of *A'l al-Bayt* and descendant of the family of the Prophet.⁶⁵ As the Iraqi conflict was evolving into a sectarian confrontation after the Samarra bombings, the presence of Shiites among the Iraqi refugees triggered a fear of alien religious influences. It was in such a context that rumors of selective deportation measures targeting Shiites emerged, though officially linked to matters of religious practices clashing with Sunni, mainstream ones.⁶⁶

Within the Jordanian population, the presence of Shiites became a cause for resentment: their perceived collusion with the US within the new Iraq, the humiliation of Saddam Hussein during the capture and, most importantly, the execution of the former dictator in December 2006 finally sparked

(Contd.)

to the variety of origins of its inhabitants (Arab and non-Arab foreign nationals, Palestinian refugees, displaced, returnees, populations from other regions of Jordan) and mostly to the clientelist aspect of State-society relationships which substitutes for a feeling of national belonging, it is often polarized around geographic origin and family status or "crystallized" around patronage networks.

⁶² Peteet, J. "Unsettling the Categories of Displacement", *Middle East Report*, n°244, Fall 2007.

⁶³ For instance, reported in: "'Little Iraq' Emerges in the Heart of Amman", *Middle East Online*, 25 January, 2007.

⁶⁴ IRIN. "Counting Iraqis to allay fears", *The Star*, February 22, 2007.

⁶⁵ Farrell, S./ Blanford, N. "Religious Split could Set Region on Fire", *The Times Online*, December 8, 2006.

⁶⁶ In October 2006, some Iraqi worshippers were reportedly deported after performing flagellation rituals at a Shiite shrine in the south of Jordan; requests by Iraqis to open a Shiite mosque were also rejected (Mattar, S. "Jordan Fears Growing Shiite Influence", *Associated Press*, November 17, 2006).

real popular anger against Iraqi Shiites in Jordan, who were, as a consequence, marginalized.⁶⁷ Bullying and even violence against Iraqi students in schools and in public places was reported.⁶⁸ Iraqis thus became unwitting socio-political agents, as their presence awakened claims of Sunni as well as Arab identity, against Arabs under US influence.

However, the Iraqi migrants' lack of social integration in Jordan does not make them a community as such. No data is available to measure the social cohesion of Iraqis in Jordan, whose economic, social, sectarian profile as shown in the Fafo study is very diverse and does not suggest the displacement to Jordan of homogeneous sectors of Iraqi society. Added to that, violence and escape in Iraq, then economic constraints upon arrival in Jordan, probably disrupted existing links.⁶⁹ Indicating the probable weakness of communal ties: intra-community assistance, so far, is reportedly limited to only one charity organisation.⁷⁰ Policies applied to them and the reluctance to grant to Iraqi "guests" the status of refugees or to give them access to specific assistance schemes, also contributes to hinder their shaping as a community. If it were not for their common feeling of uncertainty for the future, Iraqis in the Kingdom would hardly be taken as a social group.

Domestic security vs. regional dynamics

However, the fact remains that the very presence of Iraqi refugees in Jordan bears with it three challenges of utmost importance for Jordan's political stability.

First and foremost, their presence demonstrates the weakness of the new Baghdad regime, which could not guarantee the safety of its citizens and allowed them to be driven or to flee abroad. Consequently, Jordan is entitled to fear a spillover of the various conflicts occurring within Iraq on Jordanian soil, especially if enduring violence pushes more refugees to Jordan's borders, hence making it difficult for Jordan to carefully check the background of new arrivals. Similarly, security concerns inevitably target Iraqi expatriates as potential vectors of political extremism, possibly spreading Sunni-Shiite violence into the Iraqi communities in host countries or, worse, involving local Sunnis in arguments of their own. Jordan, particularly fears Shiites as a possible Iranian "fifth column", as, reportedly, "Iran is now connected to all the ongoing conflicts in the region in Iraq, in Lebanon, and in Palestine."⁷¹

Jordan also dreads Sunni militants targeting US allies and westernized countries within the region. A weak Iraq unable to control extremist groups thus endangers the Kingdom. It was actually hit when four Iraqi citizens, who allegedly entered Jordan without attracting attention, carried out the November

⁶⁷ Saddam Hussein, though acknowledged as a brutal dictator, sustained his secular, Pan-Arab stance throughout his time in power and was, indeed, perceived as the last bastion of Arab pride against US imperialism. Also, the generous redistribution system Iraq practised until the first Gulf War as a rentier, oil-producing state was extended (unlike other oil-producing states) to non-Iraqi Arabs settled in the country, for instance Palestinians who enjoyed the same subsidized or free access to housing, schooling, health system, etc. as other citizens. Lastly, Baghdad's cultural prestige and influence was still remembered among older generations who were educated in Arab universities in neighbouring countries.

⁶⁸ Shahbazi, R. "The Plight of Iraq's Refugees", September 14, 2007. http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/blog/2007/09/jordans_iraqi_r.html

⁶⁹ As suggested by some field surveys on Iraqi refugees in Syria, for example Dorai, Mohamed Kamel 'Iraqi Refugees in Syria', paper presented at CMRS' meeting on Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Eastern Africa, October 2007, The American University in Cairo. <http://www.aucegypt.edu/ResearchatAUC/rc/cmrs/Documents/MohamedDorai.pdf>

⁷⁰ The Royal Association for Iraqi Immigrants provides food and non-food assistance funded by donations from wealthy Iraqis in Jordan (Duncan et al., 2007).

⁷¹ Quoting "a senior Jordanian official". More perilously US support is seen as declining: "[the Middle East's so-called "moderate" states such as Jordan] are irritated at apparent turn rounds by the US toward Damascus and Tehran, fearing that it will be at the expense of Washington's traditional regional allies such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan" (Farrell, S./ Blanford, N. "Religious split could set region on fire", *The Times online*, December 8, 2006).

2005 suicide attacks on four hotels in Amman, for which Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia claimed responsibility through the voice of Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi.⁷²

Second, the presence of Iraqi expatriates also underlines the changing nature of the polity in Iraq: Shiites with their demographic majority now have the balance of power. Jordan, like any other country in the region as a matter of fact, fears the contagion of such a political experience.⁷³ In addition, the presence of Iraqi refugees in Jordan raises questions about the demographic profile of Iraq in the future. Assuming that Iraq stabilizes politically and learns to control its domestic conflicts and politico-religious extremists, what will be the fate of Sunni and Christian Iraqis in the new Iraq? Is the present government, elected on a sectarian basis, going to make Iraq a Shiite state? In such a case, Jordan would definitely lose its "strategic depth" and territorial buffer against Iran, the Sunni western regions of Iraq, thus seeing Jordan surrounded by a "Shiite crescent".⁷⁴ A breakup of Iraq into three distinct regions⁷⁵ leading to spatial clustering/ segregation on the basis of ethnic and religious belonging or, worse, pressures on several communities to leave the country,⁷⁶ would also have politically-destabilizing consequences for Jordan, which built its national identity on the idea of pluralism in terms of ethnicity, origins and religion.

Third, the fact remains that the main political challenge for Jordan is, above all, the pending situation of the 1948 Palestinian refugees, which influences policies conducted towards Iraqis. The Oslo Agreement and the Wadi Araba Accords signed in 1994 between Jordan and Israel, raises fears in some sectors of Jordan's population over the fact that large numbers of Palestinian refugees may have to settle for good in Jordan. Indeed, Jordan has had to cope with the endless postponement of the creation of a viable Palestinian State and with the failure of the implementation of the refugees' right of return (U.N.G.A. Resolution 194). The Oslo Agreement, however, set out the progressive freeing of parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israel, preceding the setting up of the Palestinian State. Thereby, they grant all Palestinians with a political identity coupled with a territorial identity still pending on the outcome of negotiations. They also entitle displaced Palestinians⁷⁷ to foresee a return on the lands seized by Israel since 1967, even if, for the time being, Israel keeps control of most occupied lands on the West Bank. On the contrary, even though since 1991, their right of return is widely discussed in multilateral negotiations, 1948 refugees are much less likely ever to return to their land of origin. By recognizing the State of Israel in the Oslo and Wadi Araba Agreements the Palestinian Authority and Jordan implicitly acknowledge the impossibility of the return of the 1948 refugees to territories admitted as belonging to Israel, thereby implicitly settling them in host countries on a permanent basis. The settlement of the 1948 refugees in Jordan would consequently mean that Jordanians of Palestinian origin became a numeric majority within the national population (they have

⁷² For the detail of the arguments against the Hashemite regime by Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia see <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/1105/zarqawi1105.pdf> and <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/1105/zarqawi1105-2.pdf>. On the issue of Iraqi refugees and security, see: Byman, D./ Pollack, K. "Iraqi Refugees: Carriers of Conflict", *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1st, 2006.

⁷³ This idea is also expressed in Rigoulet-Roze, D. *Arc sunnite" versus "Croissant chiite": deux faces d'un même Janus conflictuel?*, <http://www.diploweb.com>, put online August 20th, 2007 (last accessed October 2008).

⁷⁴ See analysis by Rigoulet-Roze, 2007.

⁷⁵ Still on the agenda for some American politicians and Iraqi Kurd or Shiite statesmen.

⁷⁶ The Iraqi Ministry for Displacement and Migration stated in 2007 that half the members of Iraqi non-Muslim minorities have fled abroad. According to the Mandaean Society of America, approximately 85% of Iraqi Mandaeans have left the country since 2003 (quoted in O'Donnell, K./ Newland, K. *The Iraqi Refugee Crisis; the Need for Action*, Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2008, pp. 8-9).

⁷⁷ People who were residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (whether or not registered as refugee by UNRWA) at the time of Israel's invasion, in 1967.

been full citizens in Jordan since 1950),⁷⁸ which is seen by many in Jordan as the victory of the Israeli right-wingers' "transfer theory". Socio-political splits would also probably arise between "Jordanians" and "Jordanian-Palestinians" over the recurrent question of the political representation of the Diaspora's members in Palestinian institutions and the host countries, along with associated fears of double allegiance.

The massive Iraqi influx, along with international pressure to grant these migrants refugee status, thus inevitably poses the threat of another *fait accompli*: the *de facto* permanent settlement of a large number of Iraqis in Jordan. Indeed, the ultimate fate of Palestinians and Iraqis in Jordan, added to the uncertainties concerning the future of Iraq, cause Jordanians to feel an unprecedented blurring in questions of their national sovereignty and cultural identity patterns.⁷⁹

In such a context, official statements naturally show reluctance to accept any international pressure hinting at settling any community of acknowledged forced migrants on Jordanian soil. Acknowledging Iraqis as refugees would, indeed, take away Jordan's power to keep the upper hand in the policies applied to them and acknowledge their legal entitlement to medical assistance, food, water, political protection, etc. It would also create a precedent, which Jordan fears could justify the permanent settlement of all refugees on its soil, thus raising hostile reactions from parts of the population regarding the demographic minority of so-called East Bankers. More generally, Jordan fears Iraqis could become, like the Palestinians, a permanent refugee population. By applying similar policies to all forced migrants including Iraqis, Jordan reaffirms itself as an assertive actor on the regional and international stages, one which attempts to turn international pressures to its own benefit. In the Arab opinion, the regime is defending Resolution 194 on the Palestinian refugees' rights of return, as well as helping to prevent another *nakbah*, be it from the eastern or from the western borders. Also, as the regime struggles to keep domestic stability, it reaffirms to a worried public its control over the country's sovereignty.

In light of the numerous economic, social and political challenges raised by the presence of Iraqis displaced and now in Jordan, the question emerging is the following: should Jordan encourage Iraqis to leave its territory as soon as possible, for the sake of the country's political stability?

Jordan and Iraqi refugees: scenarios for the future

Policy analysis demonstrated that Jordan is obviously not trying to evict *en masse* all Iraqis living within its borders, especially not those holding capital. The challenges of accommodating Iraqis in such numbers should not be underestimated. Yet, the Iraqi influx is, to a certain extent, also generating political opportunities for Jordan, at the bilateral regional and international levels and at the domestic level.

Migrants and bilateral relations: seeking economic and political reward

As migrants' communities in general are actors of bilateral relations, these communities act as a bridge connecting Jordan to business opportunities in Iraq. Iraq was, indeed, Jordan's largest trading partner before 2003, and Jordan has since granted preferential treatment, facilities and tax incentives to members of the Iraqi business community willing to relocate in Jordan, thus encouraging bank deposits and investments in the Kingdom. The presence of a sizeable Iraqi business community also strengthens Jordan's role as the main "gateway" to Iraq, much as in the 1990s, after an embargo was imposed on Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Moreover, Iraqis in Jordan sustain Jordan's attempts at capturing

⁷⁸ Though politically constructed by the Hashemite regime, the issue of the demographic balance between "Jordanians" and "Jordanian Palestinians" (1948 refugees, 1967 displaced and their descendants) is the most burning politically-speaking and has been structuring Jordan's political life until today.

⁷⁹ Widely expressed in opinion and to some extent in the media. For example: Faouri, H. "Jordan at the crossroads", *The Star*, 15/02/2007.

opportunities offered by Iraq's economy and, especially, the rebuilding of the country. A joint holding company was set up for that purpose.⁸⁰ Also, the "Rebuild Iraq Expos", organised every year in Amman show off Jordan as a regional business hub to foreign investors, as much as they display opportunities for taking part in Iraq's reconstruction, a market worth a staggering \$100 billion as of late 2006.⁸¹ Lasting instability in Iraq thus further intertwines Iraq and Jordan's economic fates. In this respect, it is worthy mentioning that the physical presence of parts of the Iraqi business community should contribute, in return, to helping the Kingdom carve out an economic role in the new Iraq.

On the political level, hosting Iraqi migrants also contributes to enhancing bilateral ties between the US and Jordan. Host to at least half a million Iraqis, Jordan has effectively the power of creating a refugee crisis, which would reflect badly on the root cause of such an exodus, the overthrowing of Saddam Hussein's regime and its controversial aftermath. Moreover, "[t]he U.S. government has thus far been reticent about publicly addressing Iraqi displacement, for fear that such an acknowledgement might be construed as an admission that U.S. military policy in Iraq and/or reconstruction efforts are failing."⁸² Indeed, the US is under harsh criticism from host countries and the international community for the few resettlement opportunities it has granted to Iraqi refugees, when compared to the victims of other conflicts it was involved in,⁸³ not to mention the ultimately meagre amounts of aid it granted to Iraq and host countries.⁸⁴ Therefore, by partaking in the Iraqi burden, Jordan has, for years, been saving the US from having to face up to the human consequences of the war. Indirectly, it thus strengthens its political ties with the US.

Political economy at the domestic level: Aid investment combined with a "shock doctrine"

It is hoped that host countries will soon benefit from sizeable economic compensation for receiving forced migrants. In Jordan, bank deposits have generated a boom since 2000, mainly attributed to Iraqis. More importantly, the financial toll of accommodating such numbers of new incomers is a bargaining chip to be used with international agencies and Western countries, as Jordan starts emphasizing the cost of accommodating refugees.⁸⁵ UNHCR acts as an umbrella organizer and coordinator of NGOs helping Iraqis in Jordan and unremittingly campaigning for increased financial assistance for countries sheltering Iraqis in great numbers, especially Syria and Jordan. It has centralised and redistributed increasing amounts of aid for targeted initiatives including upgrading overburdened and outdated basic infrastructures such as water distribution and sanitation facilities, health and educational structures in Jordan, as international assistance slowly begins to flow in.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ The Jordan-Iraqi Development and Investment Company.

⁸¹ Kilani, S./ Taher, Gh. "For Better or for Worse", *Jordan Business*, November 2006.

⁸² Frey et al., 2008, p. 18.

⁸³ From a few hundreds since 2003, 12,000 Iraqis were resettled in the US during FY 2008; a goal of 17,000 resettlements is targeted for FY 2009 according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) <http://www.theirc.org/news/us-goal-for-iraqi-refugees2009.html>. By comparison, the United States took in more than 900,000 Vietnamese refugees overall (131,000 between May and December 1975 only). Similarly, they accepted more than 150,000 Bosnian refugees during the Bosnian conflict (International Rescue Committee. "Five Years Later, a Hidden Crisis", *Report of the IRC Commission on Iraqi Refugees*, IRC: New York, March 2008, pp. 9-10).

⁸⁴ <http://www.theirc.org/news/iraqi-hidden-crisis-0318.html>

⁸⁵ Nimri, N. "Iraqis in Jordan cost the national economy a billion dollar a year", *Al-Ghad*, 18/4/2007, revised to \$2.2 billion as of early 2008, primarily related to meeting the education and health needs of Iraqi refugees (International Rescue Committee, 2008, pp. 7-8). Aid began to be claimed for no earlier than 2007, because "Jordan wants assistance but doesn't want to create an additional pull factor for more Iraqis to come" (Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group quoted in: Devi, S. "Uncertain Future for Jordan's Guests", *Financial Times*, March 12th, 2007).

⁸⁶ Hattar, M. "Iraq's neighbors grapples with war refugee influx", *Middle East Online*, 26/07/2007, <http://www.Middle-east-online.com/English/?id=21557>. UNHCR. "UN agencies seek US\$85 million to fund health projects for Iraqi refugees", www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/46f0032b2.html. According to various sources, out of a \$261 million appeal in January 2008, 54 million were due for upgrading Jordan's freshwater supply and sanitation. The US alone granted \$200 million

Aid and in-kind assistance to Iraqis having to be extended to needy Jordanians, Jordan thus capitalizes on the upgrading of its capacity of basic service provisions for refugees, for the benefit of all inhabitants, nationals or otherwise. This success is meant to bear long-term political benefit for the regime, i.e. "ensure that the GOJ has the appropriate resources to support its Iraqi population in the present, but also that Jordan has the means to strategically invest in its future given the long-term ramifications of absorbing a sudden influx of externally-displaced persons."⁸⁷

This somehow confirms that in Jordan "regional conflicts have also provided the regime with excuses to delay implementing sensitive economic reform, especially if such reform meant bringing major changes to the social contract and required political reform. The main argument put forward in this regard is usually that reform under such circumstances risks generating political instability."⁸⁸ However, the incoming Iraqis probably had also, paradoxically, the effect of boosting reform measures. Indeed, the direct causal relationship between price hikes (outside of housing) and the Iraqi influx is doubtful, according to a study conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies.⁸⁹ Increase in goods prices and commodities was, in part, driven by sharply rising fuel costs and the lifting of oil subsidies due to regime change in Iraq, but primarily by food prices, which have increased by 21% since 2002, due to the lifting of price controls.⁹⁰ Jordan pursued the implementation of the reform agenda by lifting price controls during the Iraqi inflow, hence making the newcomers scapegoats for price hikes. Hence, to some extent, this policy could be compared to what Naomi Klein calls a "shock doctrine", leading to the rise of "disaster capitalism": in many parts of the world from Chile to Iraq, the global "free market" has exploited crises and shock for three decades, in order to enforce on reluctant populations the implementation of ultraliberal economic measures.⁹¹

Iraqi and Palestinian refugees: overcoming Jordan's "demographic demon"?

Jordan's support of the US-led alliance to overthrow Saddam Hussein and his regime was not solely based on the political alliance between the two countries. Jordan hoped that US involvement in Iraq would lead it to taking steps in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process⁹²: though so far this has not materialized.

Given the political stakes mentioned above, of acknowledging the permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees in Jordan and other host countries, what political consequences might be expected if a sizeable Iraqi community was to remain in Jordan, as perhaps the recent granting of social rights might suggest?

In such a setup, the demographic issue of the numeric minority of "East Jordanian" vs "Palestinian Jordanian" might be counterbalanced by an enhanced feeling of common national belonging. Indeed, the demographic split may shift to opposing "nationals" (Palestinian refugees displaced from the West Bank and holding Jordanian nationality since 1950) to "non-nationals" (the Iraqis and some 150,000 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip). All the more so, if the regularly discussed issue of a confederation

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during the first half of 2008, shared between NGOs and international agencies to implement projects related to education and health services in the region. In April 2008, UN agencies appealed for \$900 million; EU and European countries also promised between \$160 and 185 million.

⁸⁷ Frey et al., 2008, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Alissa, S. "Rethinking Economic Reform in Jordan: Confronting Socioeconomic Realities", *Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, n° 4, July 2007, p. 17.

⁸⁹ Saif, I./ DeBartolo, D. *The Iraq War's Impact on Growth and Inflation in Jordan*, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, 2007.

⁹⁰ "Higher inflation rates after the Iraq war were mainly due to rising food prices, with Jordan increasing its food exports to Iraq and importing more food from abroad. The elimination of most price controls and many as part of the reform agenda worsened the social impact of the Iraq war on the Jordanian population", Alissa, 2007, pp. 16-17.

⁹¹ Klein, N. *La stratégie du choc. La montée du capitalisme du désastre*, Léméac/Actes Sud, 2008.

⁹² Lasensky, S. *Jordan and Iraq. Between Cooperation and Crisis*, Special Report 178, Washington: United States Institute for Peace, December 2006, p. 12.

between Jordan and a future Palestinian state was seriously envisaged,⁹³ thus making 2.5 million Palestinians from the West Bank Jordan's responsibility.

The presence of an Iraqi community in Jordan would, therefore, affect the definition and scope of Jordan's "demographic demon"⁹⁴ Ultimately however, the likelihood of numerous Iraqis acquiring residency or at least a visible presence in the country puts increased pressure on Jordanians, either to define patterns of national identity for the Kingdom and its citizens, or to finally come to terms with a non-national regional, identity encompassing all national affiliations and promoting citizenship based on *jus solis*. Interestingly, the Iraqi crisis and its outcome, the massive population displacement towards Jordan, may give a decisive impetus to defining Jordanian-Palestinian relations in the future.

Conclusion

Beyond the humanitarian concerns, which, should be undeniably addressed, a view from within the host communities bears relevance for policy-makers, as refugee determination process is concerned. In the specific case of Iraqis in Jordan since 2003, no consensus seems easy to reach over the short- or long-term benefits of opening borders to those migrants. Currently, they are widely considered in the opinion as burdening the economy, pressurizing weak natural and infrastructural resources, as well as threatening Jordan's sovereignty and national/ cultural identity. Opportunities brought about by the presence of the Iraqis, indeed, do not benefit the average, middle-class Jordanian as much as they benefit the supporters of political expansionist policies and high-level business people. Therefore, the Iraqi presence plays a decisive role in the ongoing political process of defining Jordan's future. Moreover, migrants rarely end their stay in their host country as soon as stability resumes in their country of origin⁹⁵, as they shift from one category or migration status to another. In return, the fate of Iraqis in Jordan is embedded in the Kingdom's political and social setup, in the web of security concerns raised by its various actors, in bilateral, regional and international relations and, probably, in the political agenda of national and international agencies and think tanks dealing with Iraqis. This is clearly reflected in the conflicting estimates of the number of Iraqis in Jordan and in the evolution of policies and attitudes towards these migrants, described in this paper. Conflicting agendas and subjective perceptions of what constitutes a security issue in the context of migration⁹⁶ is the chore obstacle in refugee status determination and, mainly, implementation.

Such a complex issue cannot have a simple solution. However, a minimal suggestion could be that policy-makers take into account the contexts of refugees' settlement and adapt as much as possible internationally designed protocols of protection to local setups, in order to avoid crystallisation of local discontent on new incomers and possible bursts of violence against them. Moreover, institutionalising the extension of emergency funds to local communities, as it contributes to enhancing the quality of infrastructures for all, refugees and locals, can change perceptions regarding the presence of Iraqi refugees. In addition, Iraqi migrants will increasingly need to access the labour market for local integration, if a long-term settlement in Jordan is aimed at. Therefore, future economic planning will need to encompass their numbers, profile and qualifications.

⁹³ Though always strongly opposed by the Jordanian authorities, this issue emerged again with the deepening chaos generated by the Fatah-Hamas conflict and in the absence of a clearly delineated Palestinian state (see: "Jordan's king rejects confederation with Palestinians", *The Associated Press*, 01/07/2007).

⁹⁴ Borrowed from Cook, J. "Israel's "Demographic Demon" in Court", Middle East Report Online, June 1, 2006.

⁹⁵ Thiollet, H. "Refugees and Migrants from Eritrea to the Arab World: The Cases of Sudan, Yemen and Saudi Arabia 1991-2007", paper presented at *CMRS' meeting on Migration and Refugee Movements in the Middle East and North Eastern Africa*, October 2007, The American University in Cairo. <http://www.aucegypt.edu/ResearchatAUC/rc/cmrs/Documents/HeleneThiollet.pdf>

⁹⁶ See Choucri, N. "Migration and Security: Some Key Linkages", *Journal of International Affairs*, Fall 2002, vol. 56, n°1, pp. 97-122 and "New Perspectives on Political Economy of Migration in the Middle East", in: Appleyard, R. *Emigration dynamics in developing countries*, volume IV: The Arab Region, IOM, 1999, pp. 19-43.

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