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► **To cite this version:**

Geraldine Chatelard. Population Movements, Power and Identities in Contemporary Iraq: A Research agenda. 2010. halshs-00511957v1

HAL Id: halshs-00511957

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00511957v1>

Preprint submitted on 26 Aug 2010 (v1), last revised 29 Aug 2010 (v2)

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Population Movements, Power and Identities in Contemporary Iraq:

A Research agenda

Géraldine Chatelard¹

DRAFT of chapter submitted for publication in R. Bocco, J. Tejet and P. Sluglett (eds.) *Writing the History of Iraq: Historiographical and Political Challenges*, London: World Scientific Publishers/Imperial College Press.

One particular blind spot in the historiography of contemporary Iraq is the question of the recurrence and durability of population displacement and forced migration². Whereas a large body of research has been devoted to Palestinian displacement, to the point of constituting an area of scholarship *per se* within the broader field of Palestinian studies, displacement and other forms of involuntary migration in and from Iraq have largely escaped academic interest as topics of their own rights. Recent trends of involuntary migration taking place in the wake of the 2003 change of regime -- particularly sectarian-based displacement as it erupted on a large scale following the 2006 al-Askari shrine bombing in Samarra -- have spurred a new policy interest for those Iraqis defined by international law and humanitarian organisations as refugees when they have crossed international boundaries and internally displaced persons (IDPs) when they have fled inside their country. As seems to be invariably the case with “hot” issues on international humanitarian and policy agendas, there is a growing number of researchers -- particularly doctoral students affiliated with Western European and North American universities -- focusing on the post-2003 displacement³. Several publications are already available attempting to provide documentary or analytical views of the most recent trends of internal displacement and refugee migration since the regime of Saddam Hussein was brought to an end⁴. These works, published or in progress, are dominated by the approach of refugee studies and concerned mostly with the anthropological, sociological, humanitarian or policy dimensions of involuntary migration from Iraq once Iraqis are in foreign countries. First-hand empirically based academic research on the dynamics, politics and socioeconomic effects of involuntary migration *inside* Iraq is conspicuously lacking, possibly on account of a security situation uncondusive to research. There might be however a more structural reason for this near absence of research on involuntary migration inside Iraq: the tendency of refugee studies to focus on the same issues, populations and geographical areas as those of concern

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² There is considerable debate in the overlapping fields of forced migration and refugee studies as regards terminology and typologies. Here, I use displacement when migration takes place under direct compulsion, whereas I reserve forced migration to cases where compulsion exists but is indirect and scope for deciding to migrate is wider. I use involuntary migration, or involuntary population movements, to encompass both instances. I do not deny that subjects have the capacity to exert their agency and make migration decisions even under severe compulsion, however it is not my aim in this essay to discuss the perspective and experience of the migrants themselves.

³ Personal observations and communications with over forty, mostly US and Western European, researchers since 2007.

⁴ Since 2007, advocacy and humanitarian organisations have produced dozens of reports on Iraqi refugees abroad and

IDPs inside Iraq. Media coverage, especially in the US and UK press, has been important as of 2008. A number of documentary films and book essays, mostly by journalists, have also been devoted to Iraqi refugees. A new but growing trend is that of memoirs written by Iraqis who recount their experiences of exile. Published academic or para-academic production is yet limited albeit, here too, growing (see, in particular, Marfleet 2007; Shoeb et al 2007; ICG 2008; Leenders 2008; Sassoon 2008; Dorai 2009; Chatelard 2010).

to institutional actors within the international refugee regime whose mandate has traditionally emphasised the protection of refugees in host countries.

Such a focus on current trends, and on refugees experiences and institutional policies outside Iraq has -- at least -- two important shortcomings. On the one hand, it leads to disregarding continuities in the phenomenon of involuntary migration in/from Iraq. On the other hand, causality for internal displacement and refugee movements is widely attributed to generalized violence and inter-sectarian conflict ensuing from the security void created by a weak state after the 2003 regime change. In this vision, which appears to be the one shared by humanitarian actors and Western government with a stake in Iraq, a restoration of state authority – expected to guarantee overall security and re-start economic development⁵-- is seen as the solution to curb new involuntary migration and lay the ground for the return of the refugees and those internally displaced. For those acquainted with the modern history of Iraq, maybe the most problematic aspect of this faith in the role of the state to solve the current “Iraq displacement crisis” and prevent new involuntary population movements is that it is precisely the Iraqi state, in its various avatars between 1920 and 2003, that has been the main agent creating involuntary migration inside and outside the country. Furthermore the Iraqi state, especially when in the hands of Saddam Hussein, also displayed remarkable attempts at retaining against their will many Iraqis inside the country⁶ and at confining certain populations in specific areas of Iraq. Without seeming excessively pessimistic about the type of regime that will emerge from a consolidation of the new Iraqi state, it is worthwhile reflecting upon the fact that government stability and economic prosperity in Iraq – both of which there was a measure of under the rule of the Ba'th -- have not correlated with freedom of movement. Although I will not address the issue here, I would argue for considering recent trends of displacement and forced migration in the light of previous episodes and ask precisely in which ways the post-Saddam Hussein trends differ from previous ones while still displaying more than minor similar characteristics.

No general historical work on modern Iraq fails to mention the episodes of mass displacement or forced migration to whom the Assyrians, Kurds of all persuasions, Türkmén, Jews, individuals deemed of Iranian descent, and Shi'ite Arabs from the South have been subjected. In the same books, readers will find accounts of the emigration (by eviction or voluntary exile) of political opponents or irredentist populations, such as the Kurds and Yazidis, a trend that dates back to the British mandate era (1920-1932). Most of the instances of displacement, forced and political migration listed above are also documented, at times in great details and using original sources, in scholarly monographs devoted to particular ethnicities, displacement episodes, political parties or historical periods. Iraqi historians writing from the perspective of Arab nationalism or official Ba'thist history are not more prone than their colleagues with a different outlook to silence involuntary migration and political emigration. Simply, they place them in a different interpretive framework and couch them in other terms.

In addition to scholarly works, involuntary migration features largely in the apologetic writings

⁵ Economic factors have been identified by Philip Marfleet (2007) as one major cause of departure from Iraq in the post-2003 period.

⁶ Alan Dowty, who surveyed emigration policies worldwide in the 1980s, placed Iraq in the list of twenty-one states imposing tight restriction on the exit of their citizens. The most obvious common denominator among these states was not the level of economic development, nor the threat of brain drain, but the nature of the regime: all were heavily ideologized one-party states. Iraq stood out, together with Burma and Somalia, as an exception in that, contrary to the eighteen other states, it was not a self-defined Marxist-Leninist regimes. Dowty notes that: “Although large numbers [of people] may occasionally leave such states, legal exit is basically viewed as a privilege to be granted by the government rather than a right to be exercised” (1988: 90).

dealing with, and often produced by politicized intellectuals among, Iraqi Sh'ites, Kurds, Türkmen and Assyrians, and in the advocacy literature of human rights and refugee organisations. It would be surprising if published or unpublished memoirs, essays and pamphlets by members of opposition parties in Iraq overlooked these issues. Here too the selection of facts, interpretation and terminology are likely to differ from the ones adopted by historians trained in Western academia. Most certainly, such production must stand in sharp ideological antagonism with the one written by pan-Arab or Ba'thist historians.

What seems to be lacking, therefore, is not historical and empirical material – necessarily varied in nature and perspective -- but rather a conceptual effort to link together various types and episodes of involuntary migration to try to make sense of the recurrence of the phenomenon and of a certain regularity in patterns. This is what I propose to attempt in this essay by broadening the perspective to interrogate the politics of population movements from the inception of the modern Iraqi state to the present. In addition to what is classically subsumed under the phrase involuntary migration, this problematization will lead me to consider other types of population movements affected by the state and other political actors.

Nation building and state control over population movements

State and conflict-induced population displacements and migration have a long history in the Middle East going back to the Ottoman empire and beyond to the Byzantine era. Such population movements also have a broad regional scope and their effects are felt in most of the modern states previously under Ottoman rule (Shami 1996). Dawn Chatty, in her recent historical and ethnographic study of 'Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East' notes in her introduction that “The Middle East in particular has been the scene of continuous forced migration over the past 150 years” and that dispossession of people in the region should be located “as part of the policy of empire, carried further by the colonial encounter and then revitalized in the Arab socialist awakening of the mid-twentieth century” (2010: 1-2).

There are several possible frameworks through which to interpret the complexity and durability of involuntary population movements in Iraq. However the overarching one is likely to remain the process of nation building. Modern Iraq indeed appears as a classical case of 20th century post-imperial nation-state formation of the type prominent refugee scholar Aristide Zolberg analysed in his seminal 1983 article on 'The Formation of New States as a Refugee-Generating Process'. Population displacements in Iraq are intrinsically linked to the creation of the nation state seeking to homogenize populations, assert sovereignty over territories contested by other nationalist claims, silence domestic political opposition, and perform population engineering as part of policies of modernisation and development. Successive Iraqi regimes have exerted control over population movements both by limiting the mobility of certain categories of the population inside the national territory and across borders, and by forcibly displacing other categories internally or outside the national space under a variety of policies and legitimization regimes. Whereas displacement took place under direct compulsion exerted by state authorities or because of conflict, forced migration for its part was usually the uncontrolled results of policies of political engineering or modernisation, particularly the mass migration from rural to urban areas. Other trends of emigration under moderate degrees of constraints were the consequences of crises of the political system or political decisions taken by governments. This was the case with the departure, after the 1958 revolution, of families who were members of the elite under the monarchy. It was also the case with the economic migration of the middle class under the international embargo imposed on Iraq in 1991 as a result of the invasion of Kuwait, and, arguably, with the exodus of the Christians over the same period. Each of these emigrant groups were driven by their own dynamics that cannot be reduced to their

relations with the state, but for each state policies were a determining factor that impacted indirectly their decision to leave Iraq.

Recasting displacement as a form of state control over populations entails to consider the phenomenon in correlation with policies restricting the mobility of people or forcing their emplacement, and with forced migration as unintended consequences of state policies. On the one hand, through systems of exclusion and inclusion, successive political powers have defined the boundaries of the nation and created categories of subjects alien to the national body and therefore susceptible to be physically expelled from it⁷. However, other types of manifestations of authoritarian governance have to be considered in connection with mobilities and their control, in particular forms of exclusion from the allocation of economic resources under developmental regimes. A historical sociology of forced immobility and confinement would also merit to be undertaken, and will be only touched upon only briefly. At another level, and more obliquely, practices of control over population movements represent an angle from which to understand the durability of violence as a means of exercising and accessing power. Examining the multiple ways in which political regimes in Iraq have exerted their governmentality through coercing mobilities allows a possible and non exclusive reading of the way in which certain practices of power and certain political identities have been historically encoded leading to patterns in the reproduction of violence⁸.

Looking at the nexus between state policies and population movements/mobility has the potential to enlighten a series of extremely important historical phenomena in contemporary Iraq. On the one hand, it may help understand how, in the construction process of a post-imperial, post-colonial, self-declared progressive and developmental nation-state --where the public discourse of nationalism and modernisation has generally dominated-- a set of social, religious and cultural identities have continued to be primordialized and have acquired (or have not lost) political and conflictual dimensions. Furthermore, looking at population movements throughout the modern history of Iraq allows to identify some of the continuities that have existed in the exercise of power under successive regimes -- monarchical, republican, military --, all autocratic or authoritarian in various degrees. An examination of control over population movements across time finally could reveal the sociological continuum that exists between states and would-be-states, that is the actors who project themselves from exile or from inside Iraq as potential states. Population movements should therefore be read as a factor structuring political identities and the reproduction of political violence.

One important premise guides my argument: the rejection of essentializing analyses of violence and political instability in Iraq as being intrinsically embedded in a fragmentary nature of the society

⁷ By degrees, such sanctification of national identity and exclusionary policies laid the ground for justifying, during the latest phases of the Anfal campaign, the mass physical elimination of those rural Kurds who resisted relocation from their villages in areas where Kurdish guerilla were active (the so-called "prohibited areas"), and who did not register in the 1987 national census as residents of designated towns or residential complexes under government control. These Kurds lost Iraqi citizenship and were presented by official rhetoric not only as traitors and saboteurs, but also as having excluded themselves voluntarily from the national ranks. Families of "unrepentant saboteurs" were physically removed from government controlled areas and forced to join their kin in the prohibited areas. This mass denationalization seems to have been a necessary step to convince local commanders loyal to the central Iraqi regime to enforce a directive ordering armed forces to kill all living beings, human or animal, within the prohibited areas (see Human Rights Watch, 1993: Chapter 2).

⁸ I draw theoretically on the concept of governmentality developed by philosopher Michel Foucault and on the work of political scientist John Torpey on the monopoly claimed by modern states on the legitimate means of circulation (Torpey 1988; Caplan and Torpey 2001).

based on supposedly incompatible religious, ethnic or tribal identities. These approaches are problematic from an epistemological as well as a moral point of view. Morally, they justify authoritarianism and state coercion⁹ as necessary modes of governance to “hold together” groups between which a social contract is posited as impossible. Alternatively, they have come to inspire the political project of territorial-based ethnic and confessional federalism promoted and implemented in post-Ba'thist Iraq by the US Administration and a number of local political actors. Epistemologically, I share the hypothesis put forth by several scholars of Iraq that political identities based on “primordial” affiliations are historical constructs¹⁰. They have developed in a dialectic relation between state powers (colonial rulers, Iraqi national governments, or governments of neighbouring countries) and local leaderships: the latter have been cast by state rhetoric and actions as ethnic or religious leaders; at other times, ethnic or religious identity politics has proven more efficient to access resources and power. Note should also be taken of the works of scholars who have shown that this dynamic has coexisted with the development of other non sectarian and non ethnic political ideologies, from pan-Arabism and communist to Iraqi nationalism¹¹. Others still have underlined one particularly striking feature of modern Iraq: the coexistence, within the authoritarian state, of modernisation policies expressed through development projects and the allocation of resources¹². The following should be taken as thinking in progress and a research agenda that offers hypotheses and tries to open up a number of conceptual paths with the hope that some will be tested and others contested by scholars of contemporary Iraq.

Control over mobilities and political coercion

Whereas the volume of the various displacement episodes taking place in Iraq since the 1920s has been variable one constant has been their collective nature: the displaced have been members of social groups identified by various political regimes as sharing an identity both cohesive and primordialized (ethnic, confessional, ethno-confessional or ethno-national, but also based on kinship ties within a patriarchal system) deemed incompatible with and a threat to an Iraqi national order. Several episodes have been massive, with people displaced by the tens and even hundreds of thousands. Others affected only members of the religious or political elites of specific groups. Displacement was induced directly by state policies of deportation usually following denial of citizenship or denationalization. This was the case case, as early as 1923, with a handful of prominent Shi'ite clerics who were also political leaders opposed to the British mandate and whose Iraqi nationality was contested by the government before they were deported to Iran (Nakash 1994; Luizard 1996). As of the early years of the Ba'thist takeover, this line of thinking re-emerged with great vigour: the same accusations of collusion with Iran and treason to the national Iraqi interest were levied on Shi'ites deemed of Iranian descent who were massively deported in the 1970s and 1980s (Nakash 1994; Babakhan 1994a). Through a train a discriminatory measures, executions, and accusations of Zionism almost the entire Iraqi Jewry was convinced to relinquish their Iraqi citizenship and emigrate between 1950 and the early 1970s (Shiblak 1986). In all instances, it was in the name of the defence of Arab nationalism that vast groups of the population were denied national affiliation and therefore expelled from the Iraqi national body.

Armed conflicts, domestic or international, have been other direct or indirect inducements for forced population movements, especially those that erupted in connection with the Kurdish and

⁹ I take coercion as a category of political violence exerted on populations by states or other political organisations (parties, militias etc.).

¹⁰ In particular, see Peter Harling's contribution in this volume.

¹¹ Prominent among those are Hanna Batatu (1978), Sami Zubaida (2003), and Eric Davis (2005).

¹² Such as, but no limited to, Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett (1983), and Habib Ishow (1996).

Assyrian nationalist claims as early as the 1930s. Kurdish displacement continued for decades, peaking in the 1980s during the eight year war with Iran. Revolts against the Ba'thist regime, particularly the 1991 uprising in the South and North of the country, were other occasions for large scale displacement inside Iraq or to neighbouring countries (Yacoub 1986; Babakhan 1994a; Babakhan 1994b; Fuccaro 1997; Alborzi 2006). Whereas some populations were forced out of specific spaces (rural, regional or national), the Ba'athist regime in parallel pursued policies of population redistribution and demographic engineering combining relocation of some ethnic groups (particularly the Kurds and the Türkmén) and the import of Arabs, the so-called policy of Arabisation of the oil-producing regions of Kirkuk and Mosul (Hilterman 2007). Most of these displacements linked to one another: emplacement of Arabs lead to displacement of Kurds and Türkmén through different administrative techniques entitling the former to food distribution, and land and housing ownership while depriving the latter of the same entitlements (Romano 2005).

In contrast with liberal states, successive Iraqi regime have not enshrined in the Law the principle of the free circulation of their nationals. The granting of travel documents has been restricted from the time of the British mandate until the post-Ba'thist era under various types of legitimation and using various administrative practices. Under the Ba'th, passports were delivered on the basis of individual and family loyalty or at least compliance with the regime, whereas the post-2003 government reinstated new control mechanisms on passport granting shortly after it came to power¹³. In both cases, national security has been the argument to justify checking the political loyalties of those allowed mobility across borders. Furthermore, the more recent period has seen a new mechanism put in place to control the exit of nationals by proxy. It is at the request of the Iraqi government that Syria and Jordan, whose regulations permitted in theory universal entry of Iraqis, introduced visas as of 2007. Those willing to move across the borders of Iraq now have to undergo a double process of screening by the Iraqi authorities and those of Syria or Jordan (Chatelard and Doräi, forthcoming). This is not to say that Iraqis have not been able to by-pass the various control mechanisms imposed on their movements, in particular by resorting to irregular practices (bribes, forged documents, etc.) or by activating patronage ties. However this has financial and social costs which in themselves play the role of selection mechanisms on would-be migrants including those fleeing violence (Chatelard 2010).

Other types of massive population movements have been approached from the perspective of control over land ownership and production and enhanced socio-economic role for landlords. Alternatively, they have been analyzed from the perspective of social, economic and political history. They can also be read more systematically as displacement phenomena resulting, often involuntarily, from the application of authoritarian policies on rural areas. Throughout successive historical periods, land or agricultural policies in rural areas of Iraq have been motivated by a national political agenda. This was the case when the monarchy sought to reinforce the economic base and the allegiance to the regime of a landowning elite in Kurdish and Arab communities (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 1983). After the 1958 military coup, agrarian policies aimed at undermining the power of this elite and ensuring state control over land (Ishow 1996). Although policies shifted radically between the monarchy and the post-1958 regimes, they sustained for decades a huge number of rural-to-urban migrants with long-term repercussions on the economic and socio-political fabric of the country. The various land-tenure or agrarian reforms correlated directly with the massive migration (within the range of several millions) of peasants to urban centres, particularly Baghdad and Basra, between the late 1920s and the 1970s. The concept of “development-induced displacement” could be adequate if it did not generally fail to qualify the governance context within which development decisions are taken and conceal inequalities of

¹³ Interviews with Iraqi migrants and refugees having left Iraq during the embargo and after the 2003 change of regime.

power in society and coercion mechanisms.

Equally authoritarian measures to maintain the rural labour-force in the countryside proved counter-productive. Under the monarchy, to contain the massive migration of impoverished peasants to the cities, a legislation was passed in 1933 (the Law of Governing the Rights and Duties of Cultivators) about which Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett wrote that: "One of the most important features of the law was that *fallahin* indebted to the landowner were not permitted to leave his employment until the debts were paid off. As the vast majority were permanently indebted, the only way to break the circle was to run away from the land." (Farouk1983: 500). After 1958, republican and military regimes applied policies of nationalisation of arable lands within a socialist ideological frame prioritising state planning and collectivisation of the means of production, and later, at the time of the Iran-Iraq war, the sale of state-owned lands to holders of capital (Ishow 1996: 195). Both failed to increase agricultural production substantially and to maintain peasants in the countryside. The latter move, in correlation with the drafting of Iraqi men to be sent to the Iranian front, created the conditions for another massive population movement, the migration to Iraq of almost half a million Egyptian agricultural labourers (Ishow 1996: 194)

Habib Ishow identifies the principle of state property over lands as bearing heavily over the rural communities by legitimizing de jure and de facto abuse of authority from the part of central governments (Ishow 1996: 192). In addition to the poor performances of the agricultural sector and food insecurity, it resulted in destructuring rural communities and the tribal system in rural areas. In the cities it brought about new class distinctions and new dynamics of economic, social and spatial marginalisation and later mobilisation and violent claims against the regime. The term *shruqi* became a stigmatizing social category originally used by Baghdadi urbanites to qualify the new migrants of rural background settled in slums at the periphery of the city, especially the area that became integrated in the urban fabric as a poor neighbourhood of the city as Madinat al-Thawra in 1958 and as Madinat as-Sadr after the fall of the Ba'th. At this juncture, the term came to be used in a derogatory manner by those castigating poor militant Shi'ites. The further swelling of impoverished marginal neighbourhoods in cities of the south and centre in the 1990s resulted also in part from state policies depriving non-compliant social groups of access to vital resources. The drying of the Marches in the early 1990s led to the destruction of the habitat and livelihoods of a marginal rural Shi'ite population that was evading the control of the regime. The number of *shruqi-s* kept growing in the cities and today form, at least in the imagination of those who have been casting them as barbarian Others, the majority of the recruits of the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia, one of the would-be-states that exerted, particularly between 2006 and 2008, new forms of violence and population sorting-out in several major urban centres.

In combination with control over the international movement of nationals, various legal or administrative measures have aimed at confining populations in specific spaces inside Iraq. This was the case with the settlement policies of tribespeople on agricultural estates owned by landlords and control of the cross-border movements of bedouin tribes aiming at emplacing populations, containing them within national boundaries and making of them obedient and productive subjects (Toth 2006: 70). Already under the monarchy civil status registration in the place of residence was used as a means of population control and to coerce peasants to remain as debt-bonded labourers on the estates of landowners (Ishow 1996: 118). Here again, fugitives to the cities tried to escape coercion by avoiding registration. The system remained in place in following decades until the food distribution system introduced during the Iran-Iraq war, and maintained during the economic embargo starting in 1991, became a more effective tool of population surveillance and control since ration cards had to be renewed annually and change of residence without re-registration signified loss of entitlements (Von Sponeck 2006: 35). The vast number of fugitives and displaced during the

last period of Ba'thists rule were de facto deprived of access to important food resources. In other instance, confiscation of ration cards was used by the government's coercion apparatus to force people to move. The ration card system, which has remained in place under the post-Ba'thist regime, continues to be used by various authorities as a means to induce people to move or to remain in place. It is even more than before a tool of population engineering, ensuring ethnic, sectarian or tribal homogeneity of entire areas, and the forming of electoral constituencies now that the ration card system serves as a basis for voter registrations. The situation of those displaced in the previous period or under the new regime, the so called IDPs, is in this regard critical (Romano 2005: 438). Today, a number of other administrative measures imposed by the central government as well as by the Kurdish regional government (KRG) impede mobility between areas inside the country: in addition to ration cards that cannot be easily transferred between administrative areas, non-Kurdish Iraqis residing in the centre or south of the country and who want to enter the Kurdish autonomous region are compelled to have a legal guarantor who is a civil servant in the administration of the KRG.

The modalities of repression via control over the mobility of political opponents have been different and devised in relation to the way regimes have qualified the nature of oppositions, rather than in relation to the way these oppositions have expressed and identified themselves. On the one hand, regimes have constantly tried to “purify” Iraq from those recalcitrant social elements whose ethnic or confessional identities could be amalgamated with non-Iraqi or non-Arab identities (such as Assyrian, Jews, Iranian, Kurds or Türkmén). On the other hand, regimes have tried to discipline and punish within the national space oppositions expressed in the idioms of nationalist or internationalist political ideologies not totally incompatible with Arabism (Communism, pan-Arabism, Syrian Ba'thism in particular). In the political grammar of Arabism there is also a difference of nature between the categories of Jew/Zionist, and those of Kurdish or Persian/Iranian. The former implies an absolute disqualification, whereas the latter two allow certain patterns of relations.

Political repression was translated into various modes of control over mobilities, from expulsion and deportation to confinement – including home arrest and incarceration. In all cases, however, this control represented one particular form of coercion accompanied with other forms of violence, including the physical elimination of individuals as members of social groups defined as political groups. All possible manners of violence were exerted from torture and individual executions, to collective assassinations and mass crimes. In several instances, mass crimes, in particular against Kurdish populations (Babakhan 1994b; Hilterman 2007), propelled large displacement inside or outside the country. In other instances, deliberate deprivation of the access to resources vital for the security of individuals (land, water, food, shelter, access to employment in the public sector, citizenship) compelled large numbers of the categories targeted to migrate to other areas where alternative resources or security were available. Finally, individuals have sought to protect themselves from coercion by withdrawing within infra-state social units (the religious community, the tribe, the family, the domestic space), not necessarily implying physical but social, symbolic and psychological displacement (Bozarslan 2003: 32).

Under all successive political regimes in Iraq, and in various degrees, the state has placed entire categories of the population in situation of great insecurity through actions belonging to different spheres (legal, administrative, economic, political, security, military etc.) but whose commonality is that they were expressions of a sovereignty that did not strive to be legitimised by the rule of law and by the people through universal suffrage. For the individuals or the groups targeted by coercion, spatial mobility has represented an answer, reactive or planned, to recover security, inviting in turn new responses from the state in its aim to maintain control over individuals and populations.

A vast research agenda remains to be open that would allow the identification of periodicities along the changes – emergence, amplifications or decline - in coercion practices and methods. A major question is the recurrence of several of these practices under different political regimes, a phenomenon that calls for interrogating how various powers have endowed coercion practices with different meanings and have embedded them in difference systems of legitimation. New ideological frames of reference, new emergencies, new historical contingencies have all provided new interpretive frameworks and vocabularies justifying coercion and control of mobilities, and new types of social groups upon whom to apply this control. The content and meaning of such notions as treason and enmity in particular have shifted over time. This leads to question the production of discourse and symbols by state authorities, in the vein of Eric David's work (2005) on historical memory and authoritarian rule under the Ba'th. While expanding an examination of official narratives and representations to the monarchy, republican and post-Ba'thist periods, focus should be specifically on the elaboration and dissemination of discourses justifying control over population movements: imaginations of the nation and of the threats bearing upon it, territorial borders and internal social and spatial boundaries, security and protection, enmity and treason, and images and sources of inspirations regarding sovereignty and its performance are all themes that should be traced, unpacked and studied in connection with the power practices they justified.

Other items on a research agenda would be the set-ups put in place for the identification and categorisation of individuals that are a pre-requisite to control their mobilities. Here again, periodicities should be delineated and their coinciding with the ruptures of political history should be verified. The example of the food distribution system that has been transferred from the Ba'thist to the pos-Ba'thist era is a case in point. Another one is the mention of religion on identity cards, or the occurrence of tribal names on identity documents. One objective would be to identify spheres of action (legal or administrative), methods or techniques (such as censuses), and technologies (such as statistics or computerisation) that have been used by successive regimes and non-state political actors today to objectify individuals through practices of identification and identity categories, in particular as members of a biological group (the patriarchal family, the tribe) or of a community (an ethnicity, a religious group, a national body).

A rich area of research concerns the actors who imagined and developed categories of identification together with policies and measures of confinement, exclusion or expulsion. What have been their biographies? What have been their models, their inspirations at difference periods? How was the Indian colonial model adapted to the Iraqi theatre by mandatory administrators and how was it contested or implemented by high level civil servants under the monarchy? Similar questions could be asked about a Stalinian model for Saddam Hussein, and an Israeli model for the US occupying power. After what model do militias today categorise individuals and operate a sorting out of populations? What about the KRG? An as a corollary, how have individuals strived to evade the stigmas attached to certain identifications and resulting threats on their security? Identity concealment, formal religious conversion (empirical evidences point to the fact that both were adopted by a number of Iraqi Jews to remain in Iraq), call to patronage in rural and urban contexts, attempts to secure alternative identity documents by bribing civil servant or acquiring them on the market for forged documentation, and migration itself have all been strategies to evade the ascriptive dimension of identity categorisation and its effects.

Political migration and the reversal of violence

Especially as of the 1958 revolution that overthrew the monarchy, a considerable number of Iraqis have attempted to escape direct political repression or the limitation of individual freedom by

leaving the country. This political emigration, in conjunction with successive waves of displacement resulting from violence and conflict, has led to the formation of exile communities of Iraqis in several countries of the Middle East (Iran, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, Jordan, Syria, Yemen and, to a lesser extent, Turkey) and beyond (Great Britain and a number of other Western European states, countries of the former Eastern block, the USA, Canada, Australia etc.) (Cigerli 1998; Al-Rasheed 1998; Vanly 2002; Fattah 2007; Shoeb et al 2007; Chatelard 2010). At times, these exits from the national and political space have taken place despite the measures put in place by the security apparatus of the state to control the movements of opponents beyond national boundaries. At other times, they have been the result of deportations carried out by state authorities.

From a historical perspective, spatial mobility cannot be considered anomalous in the Middle East (Shami 1996; Chatty 2010). In the Iraqi context in particular, the pre-monarchical legacy calls for a re-examination in relation to more recent trends of emigration. Modern Iraqi society inherited from Ottoman time vast and complex social networks based on the circulations of people, goods, money, and ideas and extending beyond the borders of the new state. Pastoral herders, tribal leaders, traders, Shi'ite pilgrims, religious students or clerics, members of Sunni Sufi orders, Kurdish nationalist elites, members of extended families and of certain ethnic or ethno-religious communities (Assyrians and Chaldeans, Türkmén etc.), those influenced by Turkish and Iranian intellectual movements, activists in modern political parties (like the Syrian Ba'th) etc. have all circulated within and exchanged across ecological, social, religious, political and economic spaces whose boundaries have never coincided with those of states. People of all social classes and ethnicities have therefore been mobile and, for those who were not, their social world was shaped and influenced by the mobility of others who belonged to the same tribal, familial, intellectual, political or religious group. Territoriality and identity as defined by the practices and subjectivities of these social groups have differed markedly from those defined by the national order colonial and post-colonial states have strived to create and secure. Places of deportation or emigration outside Iraq can therefore at times be conceptualised as spaces of belonging and familiarity rather than spaces of exile and alienation especially if they provide security and access to material, social and symbolic resources.

As regards political migration, its “identity cycle” in space and time and within changing political and ideological contexts should be considered to understand how particular identities, claimed or ascribed in Iraq, have been maintained or reshaped in migration and mobilized to contest regimes in power in Iraq and, eventually, to take control of power through violence. How has the context in countries of emigration provided or not resources to express claims towards political powers in Iraq? Along which rhetoric have these claims been voiced: as victims, minorities, as pan-Arabists, pan-Turkists, as Assyrian or Kurdish nationalists, as communists, internationalists, revolutionaries, in the vocabulary of political Islam, in sectarian terms etc.? What types of mobilisations have been available (armed, militant, diplomatic, intellectual etc.)? A particularly important question to be asked is why, unlike the nationalist momentum of the 1970s-1980s within the Palestinian refugee diaspora similarly scattered between several countries and split by several political currents, Iraqi political exiles and refugees have not developed a unified discourse and practices of resistance. What have been therefore the historical factors and local dynamics that have maintained in exile the fragmentation of the discourse, of the actions and of the identities of Iraqi exiles?

In link with the above, another set of questions regards the production of antagonistic group memories as victims and of competing visions of an Iraqi political project. What are the experiences and ideal references that have come to shape the collective imaginations of the exiles? How have those who have escaped violence through emigration integrated in their subjectivities and projects the experiences of those members of their groups who have suffered torture, assassination,

displacement etc.? What role do the ideas of return and revenge play in these imaginations and projects?

When the international power balance allowed, in 2003, political groups from the diaspora to invest the Iraqi national stage, violence was first turned against individuals who had contributed to the maintenance of the Ba'thist regime. Eventually violence was also aimed at a whole series of social groups negating their right of existence in a single political community on the basis of their being different. The theme of “the insiders” against “the outsiders”, of exile and return, initially restructured the political arena and that of violence. However, the process of “othering” shifted quickly to take a sectarian overtone. The groups and factions competing for power in the new Iraqi political order shared between themselves the exercise of violence (Al-Rachid and Méténier 2007: 115) and also appropriated what used to be another monopoly of the Ba'thist state: the means and modalities of control over population movements. In the last few years, a multiplicity of collective actors have acted through violence on the confessional, ethnic and class composition of entire urban and rural areas, displacing populations inside and outside the country, and forcing others to be immobilised. Many members of the Ba'thist political, military and bureaucratic elite have been compelled to emigrate, in large part to other Arab countries, from where some have attempted to mobilise resources to support the resistance of neo-Ba'thist insurgents inside Iraq. Violence and vexations exerted on secular intellectuals and members of certain professional categories, and against women who refuse to conform to norms of public behaviour deemed Islamic have all been incitements to remain within restricted domestic or social spaces or, conversely, to leave Iraq for neighbouring countries or the West, or to take refuge in the “pacified” Kurdish autonomous region. Iraq is today characterised by an uneven socio-spatial distribution of human security: human mobilities are restricted due to the fragmentation of the Iraqi national space into sub-units under different sovereignty regimes, and to the insecurity attached to the expression or presumption of certain group identities in specific areas. On the one hand, the sorting out of populations on ethnic, communal and class grounds is outliving the rule of the militias and other armed groups who initiated the process. Relative social homogeneity is now maintained through other economic and psychological mechanisms (such as livelihoods found in new areas of residence, fear to move back to previous neighbourhoods, internalization of the ethno-sectarian territorial divide etc.) and possibly due to government policies to fix populations in the areas where they have been displaced. On the other hand, the Iraqi government and the occupation forces have developed measures to contain population movements between neighbourhoods and regions (security barriers and walls, check-points, registration systems etc.) while exit from central and southern Iraq towards the Kurdish north or neighbouring countries is impeded in various ways both by the Iraqi authorities and by those of neighbouring political entities. This despite the fact that the uneven socio-spatial distribution of security inside Iraq still makes mobility, for many individual and collectives, a strategy of security.

One possible reading of the reluctance of Premier Nouri al-Maliki and most members of his government – the majority of whom lived in exile in Iran, Syria and elsewhere, some of them since the 1970s-- to take any meaningful step towards engaging with those who have taken refuge abroad as of 2003 is their belief that forced exile is a deserved punishment or, alternatively, that refugees are traitors who refuse to adhere to the political project of the so-called New Iraq. Several public statements by members of the Maliki government support this analysis. In this conceptualization, those newly exiled are paying the price for having caused -- if only by having failed to actively oppose Saddam Hussein-- the exile of those who are in power today. Similar remarks can be made regarding on-the-ground practices and official policies aimed at reverting the demographic balance that resulted from the Arabization campaign in the areas disputed between the KRG and the Baghdad government. For the political leadership, in Baghdad as well as in the KRG, “A

displacement for a displacement” is therefore a just retribution in a vision of justice where the punishment of perpetrators must equate the wrong they have committed, but also where whole social groups can be made responsible for the doings of one or some of their members. Whatever the cultural (some would say tribal and Islamic) legitimation of this juridical ethos, it is particularly concerning that the new Iraqi government authorities, far from playing a role as mediators by sponsoring a process of reconciliation between different groups and generations of exiled and internally displaced persons, are partisan actors justifying, if not actively promoting, revenge through involuntary migration. Let's note here that, although the Iraqi state today is not any more the proximate cause of forced migration, there is however a remarkable continuity in the conception Iraqi ruling elites have of retributive justice and the moral economy of displacement.

Some, particularly among humanitarian organizations, wonder about the possible return of recent exiles said to belong in their vast majority to the educated and secular middle class. Others have discussed¹⁴ the effects of the most recent brain drain that entails loss of competence and human capital but also jeopardizes the bases on which to construct a pluralistic civil society in the New Iraq. Might the current ruling powers be convinced by these arguments and finally pursue a proactive policy to regain the confidence of the exiles and promote their return? Or rather, might we see a repetition of the period between the 1950s and the 1980s when the economic void created by the involuntary emigration of Jews, Faily Kurds and other Sh'ites – who also formed a large part of the economic, professional and intellectual elite-- was rapidly filled by an emerging middle class trained and employed in government institutions and who became the new clients of the state? Several testimonies from recent exiles who have tried to reintegrate their positions as civil servants point to the fact that posts have been filled by a new generation of graduates whose allegiance to one or the other faction in the new government is ensured, and who are, in their majority, Shi'ites¹⁵. The vast program of 10,000 scholarships launched by Premier al-Maliki to support the education of post-graduates of all disciplines in the best foreign universities is also already starting to produce a new cohort that is taking over from those who have fled the country. It is everybody's guess what is the socio-economic, sectarian and political background of the majority of the grantees.

In this context, despite the radical rupture in the Iraqi political order as of 2003, continuities with previous periods need to be highlighted. This item on a research agenda centred on the nexus between violence, human mobilities and identity politics will require in depth exploration of the actors who have redistributed between themselves the means of control over population movements, of their modalities of actions, and of the effects of the latter on individual experiences of violence and collective identities. In post-Ba'thist Iraq such notions as territoriality and sovereignty have been profoundly altered. The state lost, and is trying to regain, the monopoly over coercive violence and over its technologies. It also lost the monopoly over the symbolic resources needed to exert and legitimise this violence. How are the relations between violence and population movements reconfigured today is a crucial question that needs to be asked.

What therefore could be read through a systematic study of control over population movements is that, beyond the numerous and brutal ruptures in Iraqi political history, governmentality in modern Iraq can be analysed along the paradigms of the developmental and the authoritarian state. Both are models adopted concomitantly by ruling powers to exert their sovereignty over populations by sorting individuals out along naturalized identity categories, each the object of a different treatment. In modern Iraq, it is the state who appears the principal instrument of the fragmentation of the social and the political by apprehending people not as individuals but as members of quasi-biologized collectives. The result is that Iraqis today do not see themselves as citizens, but as

¹⁴ See Joseph Sassoon's contribution in this volume.

¹⁵ Author's interviews with Iraqis in Amman and Damascus in 2009-2010.

members of social groups victimized by one or several other groups. Many, including at the highest levels of the political apparatus, are locked up in imaginations and modes of action that make them incapable to revert patterns of social fragmentation and political violence of which displacement and forced migration are but some of the consequences.

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