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Migration and Displacement

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The twentieth century witnessed innumerable examples of population movements around the world, including international, interregional, labor, and forced migration. Whether driven by economic concerns, violence, or some combination of the two, the varied sources and types of population movement continue to be of critical importance to states and societies. As of 2019, an estimated 272 million people, or 3.5 percent of the global population, were living outside their country of origin.¹

The prerogative to authorize the movement of individuals across borders is a core feature of state sovereignty, but scholars of comparative politics and international relations began to seriously engage with the study of migration only after the end of the Cold War. The work of MENA political scientists on migration, while not excluding consideration of supranational and international forces, has primarily focused on the state itself. This chapter shows that the state continues to play a key role in the governance of migrants in the region, but also demonstrates how nonstate and substate actors influence migration and displacement. We also place greater attention on the experiences of migrants themselves.

This chapter begins by explaining why it is important to engage with the history of migration prior to the Arab uprisings of 2011 and then considers the ethics of research on migrants and refugees today. We next examine the literature on key themes, including the relationship between conflict and migration, labor migration, state-level governance of migration, global governance and international institutions, and the nexus between diasporas and states. In each section we discuss key theoretical debates, notable empirical cases, and avenues for future research.

Migration beyond the Arab Uprisings

One of the weaknesses of many political science studies is a “presentist” bias: a failure to situate the subject(s) of study in appropriate historical context or value the role of history in current events. In consequence, developments of the day are constructed as if they are without precedent, often leading to superficial analysis and faulty theorizing. There are examples of this problem in some studies of the refugee flows triggered directly or indirectly by violence unleashed in the uprisings in Syria, Yemen, and Libya. Many of these works take 2011 as the point of departure or disjuncture for these population movements, seeing them as unprecedented rather than a part of deeper patterns. It is no doubt striking that, as of 2020, the MENA is the largest migrant- and refugee-receiving region in the world. To view post-2011 population movements as a novel phase, however, at best betrays a poor understanding of the region’s history and, at worst, erases earlier cases of massive violence-triggered population movement.

Indeed, few of the questions of interest to political scientists of the modern Middle East can be understood without reference to those myriad past episodes. For example, the First World War and defeat of the Ottoman Empire led to massive forced migration of—and genocide against—Armenians, Greeks, and other Christians, as well as Greece and Turkey’s “population exchanges” of Christian and Muslim minorities. Against the backdrop of European anti-Semitism, Zionism attracted waves of migration of Jews into Palestine, growing the Jewish national home project before and during British rule. The 1948 War then led to the expulsion or flight of more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs, some 60 percent of the total population. Thereafter, continued Jewish immigration transformed the demography of the state of Israel while shrinking historic communities of Jews elsewhere in the region. Meanwhile, another 250,000 Palestinians were made refugees in 1967, bringing the number of Palestinian refugees worldwide to an estimated 5.6 million in 2020.

Other sites of conflict and war in the late twentieth century spurred still other landmarks in the region’s population movement and displacement. The fifteen-year civil war in Lebanon that began in 1975 triggered the departure of about 1 million Lebanese—a quarter of the country’s population. Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait and 1991 Gulf War led to an emptying of the vast majority of Kuwait’s expatriate/migrant labor population, as well as massive expulsion of Yemenis from Saudi Arabia. The sanctions on Iraq in the

1990s, culminating in the 2003 U.S. invasion and subsequent intrastate violence, led to the departure or internal displacement of tens, if not hundreds of thousands. It also opened the way for the post-2011 violence that ultimately resulted in 6.6 million Syrians becoming refugees and 6.2 million becoming internally displaced, brutally reshaping the demography of the Mashriq (East Mediterranean) area as a whole.

A focus only on post-2011 developments can lead analysts to exaggerate the ways that population movements seem entangled with civil war, proxy conflict, or other dynamics of state weakness or breakdown. A more historically nuanced perspective, by contrast, reveals the vital and enduring impact of state action upon migratory flows. Indeed, the work of MENA political scientists on migration, while not excluding consideration of supranational (e.g., the European Union), international (e.g., UN agencies, NGOs, other aid agencies, as well as relevant international law), and other nonstate actors, has tended to focus primarily on the state itself. While some have written about the dangers of methodological nationalism in this regard, one cannot escape the fact that it is states and their associated institutions that (at least formally) enforce boundaries, issue and accept visas, legislate nationality policy, and play a key role in identity construction, all of which are central to the study of migration.² For instance, when MENA-focused political scientists first turned their attention to migration, the earliest studies focused on the policies of sending states toward their emigrant populations, who were overwhelmingly labor migrants in Western Europe and the Gulf.³ Subsequent work has examined Gulf state policies and the increasingly diverse set of countries sending their labor migrants to this region.⁴ To some extent triggered by shifting patterns of labor and violence-driven migration from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia and by the wars in Iraq and Syria, recent work has examined how MENA states govern migrants and refugees on their own territory.⁵ The sections that follow show that the state continues to play a key role in the governance of migrants in the region, even as scholars move that research forward by demonstrating how other actors influence migration patterns and outcomes.

In this context, to use 2011 as the main dividing point in the study of population movement in the MENA region reveals more about the weaknesses of presentism than it illuminates about regional realities. While the Arab uprisings remain an important inflection point on regional developments, it is only with historical perspective that political scientists can make sense of the complex theoretical and empirical issues raised by migration, including

the rights and obligations of host and sending states; the construction of identity; the bases of citizenship; migration as brain drain or economic safety valve; labor market integration or marginalization; political, social, and economic remittances; state formation and refugee production; and refugees as produced by and actors in various forms of violent conflict.

Ethical Methods

While informed by this consequential history of migration in the region, we recognize that much political science research will remain concerned with ongoing population movements. In this brief section, we consider challenges of ethical data collection and analysis that pertain especially to field-based research. These challenges—including but not limited to the obligation to “do no harm”—are not the exclusive purview of scholars of migration and displacement. In MENA research generally, field researchers navigate contexts of unreliable or inaccessible formal data, political sensitivity, armed conflict and occupation, and authoritarian monitoring.⁶ Nevertheless, migrants and refugees often constitute particularly vulnerable populations due to precarious legal statuses, discrimination of host states and communities, risks of retraumatization, economic distress, and their ties to a conflict state.

Researchers using qualitative and quantitative methods alike should understand how ethical data collection and its associated challenges affect the design, implementation, and analysis of research.⁷ With respect to research design, the intense attention given to some refugee populations is driven in part by ease of access to the displaced as research participants.⁸ For example, a very large number of researchers have turned to Syrian refugees to study a host of questions about Syria itself as well as the refugee experience. This practice can create an undue burden on displaced people to serve as information sources. Scholars should remain mindful of the realities of overresearched communities and consider carefully whether their research questions can be addressed without the need to intervene in migrants’ lives.⁹

In terms of implementing research with refugees, scholars should recognize the impact of humanitarian organizations and local authorities that simultaneously restrict and facilitate access to displaced populations. In these contexts, data collection is intertwined with unclear expectations of reciprocity. Research subjects, attuned to and perhaps fatigued by the practices

and presence of aid agencies, may agree to participate because they believe that tangible benefits will follow.

Finally, political science's emphasis on generalizability calls for caution in the analysis stage of the research cycle. Because research on migrants and refugees often motivates policy, the ethical stakes associated with generalizing claims are high.¹⁰ Political survey research with migrants and refugees is possible but must contend with significant obstacles to random sampling caused by the frequent absence of representative and comprehensive sampling frames.¹¹ For instance, as refugees in formal camps are generally more readily accessible to scholars, they are too often taken as representative of "the refugee experience," even though only a small portion of the world's refugees live in camps. Policy recommendations that draw on such analyses can render invisible the wider set of concerns and policies that refugees face in non-camp settings.

Thoughtful approaches to migration and displacement are possible and necessary to improve our understanding of the causes and consequences of mobility. Many of the works that we consider below demonstrate strong attention to complex ethical questions and provide models for future research on these critical topics.

Conflict and Migration

As of 2019, the UN Refugee Agency estimated that almost 80 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced by violence, persecution, and conflict, the highest number on record.¹² Syrians, whose 2011 uprising evolved into a brutal conflict, were the largest population among them—a status previously held by Palestinians. What has political science scholarship taught us about the causes of such displacement? Early studies uncovered intuitive correlations between levels of violence and "refugee stocks" at the cross-national level.¹³ More recent subnational research has examined strategic and social determinants of individuals' decisions to flee¹⁴ and how armed actors deploy strategic violence that triggers flight.¹⁵

Studies of the Middle East extend beyond the civil wars dominating much of mainstream political science and draw our attention to a broader set of conflict conditions with important implications for migratory flows. Imperial decline and warfare in the early twentieth century led to population transfers and outright genocide.¹⁶ Some of the dispossessed, like Armenians

who survived Turkish violence, found a "social home" in the Levant.¹⁷ Many, including the Kurds, were denied self-determination in the post-World War I nation-state system. Palestinians forcibly displaced by the foundation of the state of Israel were marginalized in the new "national order of things."¹⁸ These historical causes have protracted cases of displacement and statelessness into the present.

As examined in Chapter 4, contemporary conflicts and displacements in places like Western Sahara, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, and Iraq similarly relate to global political contests, as well as, simply, violence.¹⁹ But they also point to parallel sources of forced displacement such as development planning and environmental pressures.²⁰ Nonstate actors are pertinent too: recent research on the Syrian war illuminates how and why armed actors strategically displace populations and how intergovernmental organizations collaborate, or not, to protect refugees.²¹

What are the consequences of displacement, and do they include more violence? Quantifying cross-nationally, political scientists have correlated refugee flows with the spread of conflict.²² They have identified cases of refugee participation in warfare as a security problem that implicates humanitarian institutions as well as host states.²³ Scholars have also examined the ways that diasporas engage in conflict processes and suggested that they can exacerbate civil war violence.²⁴

MENA scholars speak directly to this literature. Displaced Palestinians organized politically and militarily in neighboring states, while Sahrawis in Algeria organized a government-in-exile and fought for self-determination.²⁵ At the same time, recent and massive forced migrations, including from Iraq, demonstrate that refugees need not pose a security threat.²⁶ Indeed, studies of diaspora networks illustrate a wide repertoire of nonviolent migrant engagement in conflict processes from Libya to Yemen²⁷ and as far back as the early twentieth century.²⁸ Recent research on Syria illustrates myriad forms of unarmed activism among those in exile; Syrian refugees have sought to effect change in their places of refuge and inside Syria through humanitarianism, journalism, and advocacy, among other engagements.²⁹ Additional contributions of Middle East scholarship to these debates include research on the repercussions of humanitarian crises in states that have traditionally hosted refugees, such as Yemen, and the culmination of decades of displacement on ethnic and religious geography in places like Iraq.³⁰

Some questions for political scientists interested in furthering our understanding of the conflict-migration nexus in the Middle East are: How does

the nature of conflict settlements affect possibilities for refugee return? How does rural-to-urban migration affect precarious balances of power within states in ways that precipitate conflict? Finally, how may pandemics or climate change force displacement, and with what consequences?

Labor Migration

A key driver of labor migration in the region, as elsewhere, is structural disparities across countries. Historic waves of labor migration illustrate classic theories about the push and pull factors driving migration. They also encourage scholars to go beyond them to examine multilayered “flows and counter-flows” of people, goods, capital, ideas, and information.³¹ One of the region’s earliest labor migration systems began with the travel of about one-third of peasants from Mount Lebanon to the Americas between 1860 and 1920.³² The fact that emigration became the only way to satisfy material wants after the region’s silk industry collapsed affirms arguments that it is not the poorest who migrate, but rather those where a certain level of development increases people’s capabilities and aspirations. In the Lebanese case, similar pushes and pulls fueled subsequent generations of migrants, establishing diasporic communities across the globe and reshaping the country’s demography and intersectorian politics.³³

Colonization and decolonization shaped the persistent inequalities that drove waves of labor migrants from former colonies to former colonial powers over the course of the twentieth century.³⁴ North African labor migration to Europe began with World War I and increased with demand for cheap labor in the 1960s.³⁵ In the same era, West Germany began recruiting large numbers of Turkish guest workers. While some migrants from Turkey and the Maghreb returned home, many remained and brought or established families. With the closure of the doors to legal immigration in the 1970s, migrant communities developed into multigenerational diasporas that became ethnic and religious minorities in host countries. In European studies, these migratory phenomena fueled research programs on integration, multiculturalism, racism, segregation, and Islam in Europe. In Middle East studies, there remains much to learn about who did or did not migrate in search of labor opportunities, why migrants went where they did, who remained or returned, and how these patterns shaped social, political, and economic life in sending states and localities.

Just as most of the world’s migration is within the Global South, so has a key labor migration system remained within the MENA region. Both white-collar and blue-collar workers from labor-abundant, resource-poor countries have sought employment in Gulf countries that are resource-abundant and labor-poor.³⁶ While modern migration can be traced to the discovery of oil in the early twentieth century, the 1970s oil boom led the Gulf region’s population to increase from 4 million in 1950 to 40 million in 2005—the highest growth rate in the world during that period.³⁷ Since the 1990s, Gulf countries have moved to “Asianize” migrant labor and nationalize their workforces as a whole (see below).³⁸ Still, the number of migrants in the Gulf region continues to grow, surging from approximately 25 million in 2005 to 54 million in 2015.³⁹

Migration remains a key facet of intra-regional relations as well. As Melani Cammett et al. observe, “Regional labor migration has transformed the political economy of the region more—at least so far—than trade in goods or capital flows.”⁴⁰ Yet perhaps the most important impact of labor migration is the monies that workers send home. Remittances to the MENA amounted to an estimated \$62 billion in 2018, reaching 10 to 17.7 percent of GDP in Lebanon, Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁴¹ While recipients typically spend remittances on consumption, research on remittances’ developmental consequences highlight the mediating role of political institutions. Kiren Aziz Chaudhry traces how, given state weakness in Yemen, remittances bypassed government organs and instead fueled experiments in grassroots cooperatives.⁴² Natasha Iskander demonstrates, in contrast, how the Moroccan government, motivated largely by regime survival, sought to channel migrant transfers into banks and capture them for national projects.⁴³ Studies of Egypt affirm the function of remittances as a form of rent that can buffer regimes in sending states.⁴⁴ This has implications for interstate relations, insofar as migrant-hosting states can use sending states’ dependence on remittances as a source of coercive leverage over them.⁴⁵

Moreover, MENA labor migration has long had gendered implications, as Akram Khater shows in research on women who either left or remained in nineteenth-century Lebanon.⁴⁶ In recent years, scholars increasingly note the feminization of migration to the region, especially domestic workers from South Asia, Ethiopia, and the Philippines. Anthropological and sociological research on gender and migration in the region explores how it challenges facile distinctions between forced and voluntary migration,

between migration and human trafficking, between public and private space, and between movement and immobility.⁴⁷ That these dynamics are structured by power, law, and neoliberalism—and also call attention to oft-overlooked questions about race in MENA contexts—make them fruitful topics of inquiry for political scientists, as well.

There remains much that scholars of Middle East politics can contribute to understandings of the conditions under which labor migration alters geo-strategic interests, foreign relations, economic trajectories, social structures, and individual horizons. The region offers rich cross-case, within-case, and overtime variation with which to examine how migratory circuits transform politics in both sending and receiving countries, or alternatively help uphold status quos.

State-Level Governance

When it comes to humanitarian flows, one important constraint on states' control of access to their territory comes from international refugee law, and especially the principle of non-refoulement. Historically, MENA governments have generally respected this principle with regard to refugee populations, and the region's relatively porous borders have facilitated the movement of displaced populations across states. Since 2011, however, many states have hardened these borders. Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey were denying access to Syrian refugees in 2014–15, while Jordan and Lebanon denied access to Palestinian Syrian refugees earlier. These and other states have engaged in forced returns of migrants and refugees, including Iraqis and Sudanese as well as Syrians.

Few MENA states have domestic legislation guaranteeing the right to asylum. Instead, forced migrants face a patchwork of regulations that include temporary legal statuses used to control the presence of labor migrants and dictate where they can live and work. States have physically and geographically segregated forced migrants, such as camps for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan and for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Turkey. States have also used policies to enforce temporal and spatial segregation, such as Lebanon's municipal curfews targeting Syrians since 2012.⁴⁸

There have been exceptions to this pattern of segregation, however. Syria's relatively open policy toward Iraqi refugees fleeing violence starting in 2005 is particularly notable in this regard. Sophia Hoffmann argues that it was

precisely the nonliberal, even authoritarian nature of state-society relations in Syria that made it a relatively open place for migrant Iraqis: “[A]s long as they accepted the limitations of life in Syria, [Iraqis] were welcome and would not face any particular hurdles to integration.”⁴⁹ In other cases, states have adopted neither policies of segregation nor acceptance. For instance, Kelsey P. Norman identifies a policy of “strategic indifference” toward irregular migrants in Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey when their presence did not relate to broader security and foreign policy concerns.⁵⁰

Measures adopted to control forced migrants are often tied to assumptions that their presence is temporary. Yet MENA states have also contended with long-standing migrant populations. Scholarship on migration suggests that countries seek to incorporate those migrants whom they believe can most easily integrate based on the prevailing elements of national identity. Two interrelated assumptions undergird such theories of integration as a path to citizenship: first, migrants who have greater cultural similarities are more likely to be incorporated; second, integration is a cultural and legal process that unfolds over time. Existing research on migration in the MENA unsettles both assumptions.

First, the cultural, religious, and linguistic similarities between migrant-sending and -receiving states in the region has not translated into secure paths to citizenship. This leads us to think about how the assumption that cultural similarity is a predictor of migrant incorporation overlooks the politicization of migration in any given context. For example, Gulf states' citizenship laws and constitutions define their citizenries as “Arab nations,” codifying what Ruud Koopmans et al. call “cultural monoism.”⁵¹ On paper, Muslim and Arab migrants are eligible for naturalization, but governments have undertaken deliberate attempts to exclude them. The shift away from Arab labor began with British and elite Gulf rulers' fears about Arab nationalism in the 1960s.⁵² Arab migrants were perceived to pose a security threat precisely because they were culturally similar to the local society, and therefore more likely to mobilize politically and organize labor strikes. These concerns led ruling elites across the Gulf to begin sourcing the majority of their labor migrants from the Indian subcontinent and other parts of Asia who were believed to be “politically ‘safer.’”⁵³ This stance hardened after the first Gulf War due to a perception that Arab migrants had sided with Iraq in the Gulf War and now posed a security threat. Naturalized Palestinians in Kuwait, Egyptian migrants in Iraq, and Yemenis in Saudi Arabia all became “enemies of the state” virtually overnight as retribution for their national leaders' position on

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Over 3 million legal Arab immigrants were forced from the Gulf, regardless of their own position on the conflict.

Second, there is not necessarily a linear relationship between a migrant's time in a country and integration. In the MENA, on the contrary, large numbers of labor and humanitarian migrants have been suspended in limbo in the states in which they reside. This is in part because states in the region have used time-based markers, disruptions, and delays to limit migrants' rights claims. For instance, to limit the beneficiaries who can profit from oil rents, all oil-rich Gulf states created criteria that link citizenship to those who can trace their lineage to a "cut-off" date prior to the discovery of oil. Another way of using time strategically is to discount the time of migrant residency. A notable example is the *kafala* guest worker system (in the Gulf states as well as Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon), which counts migrants as temporary regardless of how long they have lived in the country.⁵⁴ The *kafil*, a citizen, majority-citizen-owned company, or government bureau, acts as a sponsor that recruits workers and controls whether migrants can change employers or exit the territory. While work visas under this system are formally short term, economic and social ties often lead the *kafil* to extend the residency of migrants they sponsor, sometimes renewing them over generations. Although authorities never allow these residents to become citizens, they have less control over their long-term settlement. As a case in point, migrants outnumber citizens in four of the six Gulf states: the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Far from rendering migrants temporary, the *kafala* thus transforms them into permanently deportable "guests."⁵⁵

Temporary legal statuses represent a government strategy to avoid resolving dilemmas about citizenship, and especially the incorporation of minorities, refugees, or labor migrants, by postponing those decisions, sometimes indefinitely.⁵⁶ The proliferation of temporary legal statuses is not specific to the MENA region, of course, but the negative impact of such statuses is compounded by two features of the region's citizenship regimes: patrilineal citizenship⁵⁷ and widespread prohibitions against dual nationality.⁵⁸ By stipulating that only fathers can pass along nationality to their children, patrilineal citizenship regimes have become a key path to statelessness in the context of migration, especially when the father is a refugee, absent, or a member of an unrecognized minority. The challenges that displaced Syrians are facing in registering their children born in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and Iraq since the beginning of the Syrian conflict are merely the

most current illustration of a problem that has beleaguered families across the region for decades.⁵⁹

Further research is needed to understand the policy implications of the growing number of partially incorporated and stateless populations in the region, the varied legal and governance systems that regulate their presence, and the prospects for long-term integration. There remains much that political scientists can contribute to our understanding of the conditions under which migrant integration and citizenship (or the lack thereof) shapes regime change and stability, interstate power politics and foreign policy, and political mobilizations across the region. Among the promising areas that have only recently begun to be explored in MENA contexts is subnational and multilevel governance in migration policymaking, given that enforcement of internal control often depends upon the cooperation of public actors across the municipal, provincial, and national levels.⁶⁰ Finally, another question worthy of further research is the role of private actors and non-state actors known to provide many state-like functions in the region, in migration governance and border control.⁶¹

Global Governance and International Institutions

Global migration governance can take many forms, including bilateral, regional, transnational, and supranational agreements that shape how and where people can migrate.⁶² These agreements create and perpetuate international norms, reveal how states' interests overlap and diverge, affect national-level policymaking, and restrict recruiting and labor practices of local employers. Drawing on Wallerstein's world systems theory, Douglas S. Massey et al. posit that economic interests of the state or its capitalist elite draw upon disparities in power, land, raw materials, and labor to incentivize migration.⁶³ These patterns have historically benefited colonial powers; however, contemporary economic disparities among MENA states create a "regional core" when states such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates import migrant workers from less wealthy countries such as the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. Despite wealth differentials, migrant-sending states have temporarily halted the flow of labor migrants to exercise influence over MENA host states when their emigrants have been mistreated. In 2016, for example, Uganda's Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development criticized Saudi employers for the inhumane treatment of Ugandan domestic

workers and banned the recruitment of their nationals. Such efforts to penalize wealthy host states for the mistreatment of domestic workers are not uncommon. Nevertheless, the financial benefit of remittances for sending states are simply too alluring to abolish these labor practices. Therefore, abusive relationships continue to characterize domestic labor migration throughout MENA.

Other systemwide approaches to immigration control include the use of extraterritorial measures to keep refugees and migrants from entering state territory.⁶⁴ European and MENA states have signed numerous memoranda of understanding to curtail migratory flows, notably from Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt.⁶⁵ European Union Readmissions Agreements, such as those with Morocco and Turkey, stipulate that these countries readmit their own nationals and third-country nationals who have traveled through their territory. In exchange, Morocco and Turkey have benefited from mobility partnerships and relaxed visa restrictions. While studies of the EU abound, there remains a dearth of scholarship about how MENA states represent their interests at the international level.

The United Nations is one of the primary international institutions that influences the movement and reception of migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). From the International Labor Organization, which combats forced labor and trafficking, to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, established in 1950), which supports refugees and IDPs, the UN's international breadth is made possible because of its role in MENA. The region's willingness and capacity to host refugees are essential for upholding the contemporary global system of refugee management. But the region's hosting of the largest number of UN-recognized refugees is not an accident of geography. As Rawan Arar argues, refugee containment in the MENA, incentivized through humanitarian intervention, is valued as a measure that curtails migration to the West.⁶⁶

Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar calls the global system of refugee management the "grand compromise."⁶⁷ States in the Global North pay to host refugees abroad while resettling a select few (historically less than 1 percent). States in the Global South host the vast majority of refugees and face the challenges of porous borders, security and welfare concerns, as well as the interference of international institutions in national governance.⁶⁸ Through the UNHCR, most refugees are the responsibility of the "international community," a term that simultaneously obscures the contributions—or lack thereof—of individual states and creates a sense of universal compassion.

The protection of Palestinian refugees, however, does not fall to the international community or the UNHCR. Instead, Palestinian refugees are under the protection of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which operates in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Despite being the first non-Europeans to be recognized as refugees and comprising over 20 percent of the world's UN-recognized refugee population in 2019, Palestinian refugees are systematically excluded from many of the global "solutions" that have been used to address the displacement for other populations.⁶⁹

Juxtaposing UNRWA to the UNHCR reveals how politics operates under the guise of humanitarianism, with far-reaching consequences for states and people. The UNHCR offers three "durable solutions" to address refugee displacement: repatriation, local integration, and resettlement to a third country. These solutions are not available for the majority of Palestinian refugees despite being broadly accepted by state and humanitarian officials as best practices.⁷⁰ First, Israel does not allow Palestinian refugees to return to their ancestral homeland, making repatriation inaccessible despite being upheld as a right in Resolution 194 of 1948. Second, resettlement is also inaccessible to Palestinians because UNRWA does not facilitate that practice.⁷¹ While less than 1 percent of the world's refugees are ever invited to permanently resettle, those who are selected are usually offered a pathway to citizenship in a Western state, but almost no Palestinians gain such opportunities. Third, Palestinian refugees' experiences may be best characterized by local integration, although the feasibility of integration remains questionable when political incorporation is largely unattainable in the region, save for Jordan, where most Palestinian refugees have citizenship. Thus, while UNHCR operations are part of a global migration-control apparatus, UNRWA remains regional. Moreover, while UNHCR operates as a liaison among states, UNRWA takes on the added role of "peacemaking organ" intended to "'solve' the refugee question."⁷² UNRWA, therefore, exists (and is funded) to promote regional stability—not to advance refugees' rights.

Political scientists interested in centering MENA in a global analysis are invited to reimagine how globally consequential agreements are mutually constituted despite the hierarchy that characterizes the international state system.⁷³ How do MENA state interests shape cooperation regarding mobility and migration? How does humanitarian intervention influence global governance in MENA? And what role do UN agencies play in MENA beyond emergency relief for refugee populations? Further exploration of

such questions can build a deep understanding of states and societies in MENA, allowing scholars to decode political interests that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Migration, Diaspora, and the State

To date, research in the fields of diaspora studies and political transnationalism have made significant contributions to our understanding of the ways movement of people into, out of, or through the MENA region have shaped state institutions and broader sets of relationships between state, migrants, and society. Early studies tended to focus on diaspora communities' lobbying on behalf of the homeland from within the host state, although Laurie Brand's early work on Palestinian diaspora communities examined the Arab host state policies toward sociopolitical institution building underpinning the reemergence of the Palestinian national movement.⁷⁴ More recently, Nadejda K. Marinova has examined when and how diaspora leaders attempt to influence host state policies toward the homeland.⁷⁵

Another thread of this literature reverses the traditional focus on the host state to examine how sending states relate to their communities of nationals abroad. Brand was the first to look comparatively at these relationships using MENA examples.⁷⁶ Her research revealed an evolution in state-expatriate community involvement over time, countering the prevailing assumption that its main driver was remittance capture. Initial institutional involvement in the diaspora often sprang from security concerns; only later did securing remittances and nonmaterial forms of belonging become more central. Related work has focused on out-of-country voting, exploring the impact of including citizens residing abroad in elections "back home."⁷⁷ Likewise, using the example of Egyptian labor, Gerasimos Tsourapas has looked into how states used migration policy to serve both foreign and domestic policy interests.⁷⁸ Because many of these sending states are not democratic, these and other modes of influence over diaspora intimately reflect as well the prerogatives of authoritarian regimes, which—as Chapter 2 emphasizes—remain intent on subduing new forms of political opposition against their authority. That such opposition can mobilize among citizens living abroad hence makes diasporas an unfortunate target for transnational repression.⁷⁹

Yet another major, still largely unexplored area is the historical relationship between population movement and state formation. There is a significant

and growing literature on migration to the Gulf oil-producing states, but rare are examples that explore the inextricability of these states' development and the role of migrants. This gap may owe to the relative political marginalization and precarity of migrants' situation as nonnationals governed by the *kafala* system. Or it may be an extension of the nation-state bias, which long led political scientists to shy away from substate transnational actors. One way to explore theoretically the many questions suggested by this relationship between migration and the state is to group together types of population movement according to the initial drivers/impetus. Such an approach can generate hypotheses regarding how migration helped shape which part(s) of state formation and at which historical stage. Here we list just a few major categories.

First, settler colonialism. One example is the massive French settler project in Algeria. Existing studies of the political legacy of this 162-year colonization, including its impact on the metropole itself,⁸⁰ could offer insights into other cases. Farther east, most of the contributions to our understanding of the ongoing example of settler colonialism in Israel/Palestine have come from historians and sociologists.⁸¹ Political scientists have also largely ignored questions regarding the impact of the successive waves of Palestinian refugees on institutional or economic development in surrounding states. To pose just one instructive counterfactual: How different might the Jordanian state look today had it not received and enfranchised Palestinian refugees?

A second category for research on the migration/state formation nexus is labor migration. Some work on North Africa has examined the importance of migrant remittances on bilateral relationships (i.e., France-Algeria, Spain-Morocco).⁸² For the Gulf region, earlier studies detailed the role of (expatriate) British colonial authorities in the establishment of proto-state structures.⁸³ Others considered the labor of noncitizens as part of political economy analyses of state formation or nationality.⁸⁴ Scholarship on migration to the Gulf still has a great deal to tell us regarding the impact of labor migration on the evolution of sending or host state civil bureaucracies, security apparatuses, organized labor, political parties and movements, and educational systems.

Finally, given the centrality of conflict-triggered migration to the region's history, political scientists could turn their attention to the domestic political ramifications of the country of origin's loss of population, in terms of human capital, regional or ethnic balances in the population, deterioration of state services, etc. Perhaps most relevant is the politics of responses to return and

resettlement. Here, among the many topics in need of analysis are the content and form of processes of reintegration and reconstruction, and their import for, inter alia, the scale of refugee return; the speed at which educational, health, and other social welfare services are resumed; and internal stability and regime legitimacy.

Conclusion

While political scientists of the MENA region may have come to the study of migration later than scholars of other regions, both the historical record and the challenges of the day show that the region has been and remains a critical crossroads for the movements of people. With the Global South the primary site of forced or voluntary population movement, the MENA offers scholars fertile ground for developing new insights and a valuable basis for comparisons with other regions' migration experiences.

The field of migration studies provides, paradoxically, dramatic examples of the continuing importance of state sovereignty as well as instances of state weaknesses or impotence. Militarized border checkpoints, passports, and visas discipline population movement on the one hand, while refugees, traffickers, and migrants in search of physical or economic security transgress state boundaries, on the other. External actors have driven or abetted forces triggering migration, while international/supranational organizations have played key roles in the governance of refugee movement and settlement.

As this chapter goes to press, a great deal of scholarly attention remains focused on the Syrian refugee crisis. However, more attention is needed to ongoing displacement crises elsewhere in the region, such as in Yemen. Beyond cases of war-driven displacement, examples abound also of other pressing current issues in MENA politics related to population movement or lack thereof. One example is the wide-ranging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration to and from the region. Most obviously, borders closed and legal transnational movement came largely to a halt. The impact of the coronavirus thus laid bare the vast gaps between rich and poor, and between citizen and noncitizen. It also highlighted the myriad vulnerabilities accompanying many migrants' poverty and precarious legal status, whether in North Africa, the Mashriq, or the Gulf. Several Gulf states, for example, have called for expulsion of nonnationals and greater stringency in controlling movement and regulating foreign labor, alongside more emphasis on

indigenizing their workforce. Beyond what these developments may mean for the possible restructuring of domestic and regional labor markets are the potential impacts on national identity construction, economic security, and political stability in host states. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the changing nature of diaspora-homeland ties, reduced remittance flows, and perhaps even undermined large-scale return migration. At the same time, new pandemic-driven economic crises in the coming years may lead humanitarian organizations and donor states to reduce, redirect, or withdraw aid to refugee projects or crisis spots.

Given the growing body of work by MENA political scientists on these issues, the field is well-placed to provide historically grounded analyses of this new era in regional migration, as it has during past moments of upheaval or gradual change. The questions raised by population movement into, out of, and within the MENA region are many, expansive, and ever-evolving. They interface directly with corollary research by scholars working on similar topics in other regions. They also collectively highlight some of the most important of the challenges that political actors—individual, national, regional, international—face as the twenty-first century unfolds into its third decade.

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