

A Tale of Two Cities: Iraqis' Accounts of Home and Belonging in the City of Helsinki and in the City of Rome.

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Abstract

Based on a qualitative research with both the Iraqi Arabs and the Kurdish Iraqis who have been living for two to thirty years abroad, this paper explores the meaning of home and belonging, discusses how home is remembered and where it is located. Cities, Helsinki in Finland and Rome in Italy, provide opportunities for a structural comparison in the local and the transnational perspectives. The aim is to describe from a sociological point of view, especially the orientation to real, imagined and the new homeland, the impact of the cities on the process of inclusion in the society of settlement.

KEY WORDS: *Myth of return, home, belonging, transnationalism.*

Introduction

This article analyzes how the "myth of return" - a belief among migrants of returning back to their home country on an undefined date in future, promotes or mitigates the integration of transnational Iraqis in Finland and Italy. Firstly, the concept of the myth of return is discussed, as a transnational concept is capable of explaining the challenging relationship

between the immigrant and the country of origin, as well as the country of settlement. Secondly, the way how home and belonging are constructed across different localities by Iraqi people is clarified. Thirdly, based on the collected data, four *ideal types* which illustrate where home is located by Iraqis in Helsinki and Rome are identified and explained.

The development of a new globalized world characterized by fast connections and information technologies frames the new migration order. In the new global perspective, migration has challenged societies as well as the roles of the nation-states on making political, social cultural and economical policies. Migration is not a new phenomenon (Castles & Miller, 1998); what is new is the frame in which migration manifest itself. In the past, migration, both voluntary and involuntary, could be described as mainly a bipolar movement from the point of departure to the point of arrival; today, migration manifests itself in a more multiple way and with inevitable consequences for migrants both in the sending and the receiving societies (ibid.).

Recently, social scientists employed the term “transnationalism” as an analytical concept through which the variation in the approach to migration is explained. Studies in transnationalism have challenged concepts among nation-states, family, citizenship and society. Basch et al. (1994:7) defined transnationalism as “the processes by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement”. Migrants, in fact, engage in different kind of activities which may span over borders, as a result create an intangible net across two or more countries (Basch et al., 1994; Faist, 2000; Levitt, 2001; Vertovec, 1999). Moreover, internet, new technologies and transportation help migrants to compress time and space, allow communication in a more

frequent and cheap way than in the past. In current literature on migration, intensifying of diaporic identities, multiple identities and concepts such as deterritorialization, diasporic spaces, are the embedded consequences of a new global era as exemplified by Brycenson & Vuorela (2002).

Thus, some sociologists argued that to better comprehend the dynamics of transnational migration, it is opportune to broaden the analysis to cover the nation-states' borders where migrants settled. This implicates, as an emerging consequence of the transnational paradigm, a shift from methodological nationalism (where nation-states are the unit of analysis) to methodological transnationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2008). Methodological transnationalism, in fact, allows reformulation of the existing accounts and data, invention of new kind of information and evidence, application of the existing investigative approaches, and design of research tools and approaches with which analyzing, interpreting and explaining transnational dynamics and phenomena (Levitt, 2007:11). However, this perspective is fashionable and feasible amongst researchers in U.S, while applicable mainly to immigrants populations, instead of refugees' ones.

On the other hand, scholars of transnationalism have argued that transnationalism can be applied to both contexts of voluntary and involuntary migration. Migrants and refugees are simultaneously in contact with multiple countries (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Vertovec, 1999). Nowadays transnational connections among refugees are attracting interest from researchers (Van Hear, 2006; Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Al-Ali *et al.*, 2001; Koser, 2002; Wahlbeck, 1999, 2002). For instance, Cohen (1995) argued that transnational political activities especially in human rights field are embarked by people living in Diaspora as an answer to their

oppression and pain they went through. But what is the difference between immigrant and refugee transnationalism?

In particular, "refugee transnationalism" differs clearly from that of other immigrants because refugees are *forced* to flee from their homes; also, refugees have different motivations and resources available to them than do other migrants who may form transnational networks in a quest for economic advancement and social recognition (Sherrell & Hyndman, 2006:19).

Methodological Clarifications

Social scientists employed diverse methods in order to describe, discover and understand the social life. In particular, qualitative research conducted in this article tries to understand how the world is socially constructed by its participants, and what meanings those constructions provided for the participants. The notion of the "constructed world" implies that individuals reside in a social, private and relational world that can be viewed and constructed by considering different perspectives. Therefore, the world is constructed and shaped through languages, memories, systems of meaning, etc. Data collected by researchers in a qualitative paradigm are thus rich, complex and various.

The interview guideline was so designed to investigate Iraqi people¹ in both countries (Finland and Italy), in order to get a general picture of the life of them in different societies of settlement. Intensive research was performed for 6 months in Helsinki in 2007, from

¹ With "Iraqi People" I refer both to Iraqi Arabs and Kurdish Iraqis.

February to July and another 6 months in Rome, from October 2007 to March 2008. 48 Semi-structured interviews were conducted, and were combined with participants' observation.

Every interview lasted for approximately 2 hours. In most of the cases, the interviews were anticipated by previous conversations and meetings. Interviewees decided where and when to meet. Generally, their home and working places, mosques and cafes were the preferred locations. Scrupulous attention was dedicated to the issue of anonymity and assurance that data were used only for research purposes. Interviews were ended when the so called "saturation point" was reached. The interviews were almost all tape-recorded and fully transcribed including symbols to indicate pauses, silence, enthusiasm, intonations and overlapping speeches (Esterberg, 2002). Only in few cases, in general with clandestine, interviews were not recorded to meet their wishes and ethical principals.

In every interview, Iraqis were encouraged to answer some questions, focusing on their lives in the country of origin, memories and conditions which forced them to flee, desire of going back and experiences of life in the country of settlement, nature and extension of network in the Iraqi community and expectation for the future of their country. Feelings, hope, memories were analyzed as a starting point for explaining questions such as home, belonging, desire of going back and expectations for the future.

4 different sources were used to select samples:

1. national researchers/activists in the field of migration and refugees studies;
2. national organization/associations with multicultural orientations;

3. internet resources; and
4. mosques².

The snow ball technique was then applied. It allowed the researcher to contact a respondent who in turn suggests a third, a fourth name and so on.

The diversity of gateways helped guarantee a sort of variation on Iraqis' population in terms of background, status, ethnic group and network characteristics. To maintain a variety on the segment of the community and to avoid or limit the production of biased samples, the fact that a diverse range of refugee experiences discovering variation (even inside the same kind of ethnic group) is emphasized. People who belong to different networks were reached. Therefore the problem of representativeness generated from the snowball technique was partly solved (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

To be included in the sample, Iraqis had to be: a) Kurdish and Arab Iraqis settled in Finland and Italy for a minimum period of 2 years up to 30 years. The time frame is therefore an important variable to better specify the connection between the "myth of return and the integration". b) in network with other Iraqis (from Iraq and /or other countries) who are named as "transnational ones". c) at least 15 years old when they left Iraq. It is important because the meaning of home, homeland and memories are deeply analyzed. The analysis of immigrants' home and life before the exile is significant for understanding the dynamic of the myth of return among different immigrant groups (Joly, 1992).

² The reason of utilizing different channels was to avoid interviewing refugees with similar educational or ethnic background. Interviewees often suggested other refugees /immigrants with relatively homogenous social traits in terms of experience, age, political affiliation and length of migration for interviews. Diverse channels provide variation in the chosen sample.

Integration versus transnationalism

In the present studies, integration is defined as a *process by which immigrants and refugees engage with, and become part of their resettlement society* (Valtonen, 1998:41).

Integration is a long-term process influenced by expectations and events in the country of origin as well as that in the country of settlement. By incorporating a transnational analysis in refugee studies, the fact that refugees hold and build up multiple relationships both within and between the sending and receiving countries is recognized.

“Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states (Basch, et al., 1994:7)

Transnationalism recognized that settlement and integration cannot be completely understood without considering the ongoing social, political, cultural and economic ties that are developed and maintained across the borders of the two states (Sherrell & Hyndman 2006). Moreover, refugees' movement from one place to another creates a particular human relation that affects the way refugees look at a possible local integration or a possible return home (Van Hear, 2006).

Usually, the possibility of return to the home country plays a fundamental role in the life of refugees since their first day of exile, and it should not be overlooked during the process of settlement in the host country. The life that a refugee lost when leaving his/her home country cannot be found in the new host country. Therefore the refugee has to adapt to the

new environment. Some of the important questions are: do the reception policies aim at institutionally include the refugees in the society? Do the refugees themselves want to be integrated? The integration also depends on the personal refugees' relation with their country of origin (Joly *et al.*, 1992).

It has been demonstrated that unsuccessful settlement [in a host country] frequently leads to an unsuccessful return [to a home country] (Joly *et al.*, 1992:65). However, more integration is discussed while less return is considered. It is important to clarify that speaking about integration does not imply a point of no return to the country of origin. Rather, it is crucial to observe how these processes determine each other, and how they have become *transnational issues* (Piperno and Stocchiero, 2006).

Lately, sociologists argued that integration and transnationalism may coexist. Immigrants may be integrated into the host society and at the same time, feeling close to their home country in different ways. For examples, sending remittances, having friends and relatives back home or simply working between two countries or having the desire, soon or later, to go back to their home countries (Levitt, 2001; Al Ali *et al.*, 2001).

Identifying the core category: the myth of return as a transnational concept

To better understand the dynamics between integration and transnationalism *from below* (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998), the concept of the “myth of return” is utilized³. The myth of return implicates a two-way analysis focusing on the relation between the refugee and their homeland, as well as the immigrant and their host society.

The two words, myth (usually a fantasy) and return (maybe a reality), connote a wishful fantasy, or belief, of immigrant that, in an unspecified date in the future, they will return permanently to their homeland. While aspirations to return are not regarded by the migrants as a myth, they become a social myth because they never materialize despite the fact they are commonly expressed by many migrants of different ethnic origins (Cohen & Gold, 1997:375).

The concept of the “myth of return” is a theoretical construction which allows investigation on how the desire of return is created and maintained by the immigrant. From the immigrant’s point of view, the myth of return is interpreted as a desire or wish to return which remains only in mind and they never take action.

The myth of return is conceived as a “transnational concept” in the present studies. A transnational concept is perceived in a transnational frame. It acquires significance in moving from a national setting to a transnational one. Therefore, the myth of return implicates a bi-directional analysis, focusing on the refugee and their homeland, or the refugee and their host society. At the same time, the myth of return illustrates how the refugee perceives the exile amongst societies, moving from the past experiences to the future perspectives. Therefore, the desire of return acquires significance from the double analysis which collocates the immigrant between spaces and time.

³ When I carried out the first pilot interviews, I noticed that one of the most frequent discussions dealt with the “desire and/or dream of going back” to the country of origin in the future.

The concept of “the myth of return” challenges the notion of “home” and encourages the renegotiation of identity, in both the individual and the group levels. The concept of the “myth of return” is dependent on the relationship of refugee group(s) with the people of their homeland, where the latter are physically but not emotively interrupted (Al-Rasheed, 1994; Zetter, 1999; Joly, 2002).

Previous literature on the “myth of return” has attracted interest. Anwar (1974) studied the situation of Pakistani in England, noticed that as the “myth of return” arises from the common consideration, their stay in Britain had to be a temporary measure. This consideration remained an unfilled expectation until today, when the majority of them have remained in Britain because of economic reasons and their children’s future.

In her study of the two refugees’ groups in London, the Iraqi Arabs and the Iraqi Assyrians, Al- Rasheed (1994) pointed out that the myth is not a universal state of mind, but it is a fluid concept. She pointed out that even if the refugees came from the same country, they did not constitute an undifferentiated mass of people just because they share the displacement, persecution, fear, similar cultural tradition and language. She discovered that the aspect that differentiated them was their relationship with their homeland. While the Arabs showed a specific and deep attachment to their homeland, the Assyrian, recognized as a minority in Iraq, because of this discrimination, the latter were more orientated to integrate into the U.K. As a result, the Iraqi Arabs perceived their exile as a temporary state, while the Assyrians recognized their immigration as a permanent one.

Many years later, Zetter (1999) -renamed the “myth of return” with the “myth of home”. He focussed on the fact that what is idealized is not the “return” *per se*, but the meaning of home. Zetter (1999) suggested studying the Greek-Cypriot refugees⁴ as they maintained a strong conviction to return home while adapting to their exile. However, while Al-Rasheed explained that the development of the myth of return is dependent on refugees’ past experiences and the group’s relationship with its country of origin, Zetter failed to explain why the myth of return varies in intensity, from individual to individual or household to household.

Lately, some sociologists have criticized the concept of the myth of return. For example, Israel (2000) preferred talking about the “ideologies of return”. Mouncer (2000: 63) by analyzing the Kurds’ dream of return, affirmed that myth and nostalgia may negatively depict refugees, as passive actors are unable to determine their future. Others such as Cohen & Gold (1997) and Mohseni (1994) argued that the existence of the myth or hope of return corrodes the integration in the host society, creating collective social fantasy.

In the present studies, the myth of return is found to act as a cohesive force which reinforces the kinship of the community in tying up with their country of origin. Specifically, the myth is considered as a nutriment of mind for the refugees. When they had to manage and adjust their lives in the countries of settlement, they could think of their good days in their homelands.

A tale of two cities: Helsinki and Rome

⁴ They were displaced in the 1974 by the Turkish troops from the North to the South of Cyprus.

Helsinki and Rome are the “social laboratories” (Park et al., 1970) in which the empirical research and the social theories are integrated for the present studies. Since its establishment in 1920, the Chicago school has been recognized to be the first and the most effective centre for sociological qualitative research in promoting “field research studies”. The “field research studies” are based on methods presented in the sociological tradition as well as on the anthropological one. The inductive approach, presented in field research studies, immersed the researcher in the social world. Instead of starting with a theory, the researcher starts their research studies by an examination of the empirical world. Instead of testing hypotheses, the researcher focuses on gaining access to the site or the people under studies.

Helsinki and Rome have different historical background and economic structures, but they are labelled as countries of new immigration. In an increasingly globalized world, cross national comparative studies consented to get and analyze socio-political, economic and cultural flows across borders. In particular, Snyder (2001:96) noticed that, comparing similar *“sub-national units” across distinct national units may be a more powerful strategy for making valid causal inferences than comparing national units*. Sub-national comparison is useful because it impedes researchers to generalize from cases in the same country and allows them to move from the global to the local and vice versa.

Therefore, it is interesting to compare the life of Iraqis in two cities of two different European countries, because Iraqi people may develop different lives and perspectives about integration and the possible return through the way they organize their socio-cultural, political and economic activities, and the resources available in the respective countries. Social scientists have lately stressed how local research in the city has gained attention again (Pennix, 2000; Sassen, 2000; Bousetta, 1997). Macro social trends such as globalization and

new technologies, etc., strengthened and intensified the shift of transnational connections between global and local perspectives. As a consequence, the city is no longer being considered as a bounded place. Instead, it may engage with the global directly and often bypass the nation in different types of political, economic and cultural operations. (Sassen, 2000:146-147).

On the other hand, cities are characterized by heterogeneous features. Some sociologists argued that the nation states and the cities play an important role in creating and maintaining transnationalism (Ong, 1999; Guarnizo & Smith, 1998). Countries shape transnationalism not only by setting boundaries, but they also provide channels for transnational activities (Al-Ali, 2002:100). Moreover, the intensity and the variance of the transnational activities may be explained also by looking at the great level of heterogeneity among the refugees communities (Al-Ali 2002). Considering people of the same ethnic background as a definite group can drive to a mistake. Therefore, differences such as education and professional background are also important to be considered next to the ethnic background, gender and age as well as specific past events.

Iraqis in Rome: a diversified population

Immigration and refugee policies in Italy failed to develop an organic system of reception and integration as other European countries did at the national level (Delle Donne & Melotti 2004). On the contrary, a "*decentralized cooperation*⁵" or so-called "*partnership approach*", has been driven by municipalities, provinces and regions and coordinated sometimes by associations

⁵ Barbarella, C (1998). Il Ruolo della Cooperazione decentrata. *Politica Internazionale*, N.1-2. Roma: Ipalmo.

and NGOs, as an answer to the indecisiveness of the Ministry of the Interior. As Puggioni (2005) argued, the informal and diffuse assistance network, developed side by side with the lack of a centralized welfare policy. Voluntary and charity associations, NGOs and centers run by churches, played the fundamental role in dealing with these emergencies. Korac (2003) stated that the limit of the “top-down state policies approach” could be dependent on a relatively strong and organized informal network. For historical reasons, it has always been playing a central role in Italy.

From the collected samples, the diversified Iraqi population shaped by the time of arrival and legal recognition are presented. Besides, some precise characteristics of the new Iraqi immigrants in Italy are highlighted. In that case, Italy is considered as a country of transit, not the destination. Also, a new transnational perspective arising from the fieldwork of the author is introduced.

The majority of the people that arrived in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s were of Arab ethnicity and they came to study. Their majors were specialized mainly in the field of art, architecture and cinema. On the other hand, since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a constant movement of Kurd people across the border legally or illegally.

When the government in Iraq had collapsed and Saddam Hussein came into power as a general in the Iraqi armed forces in 1976, few Arab Iraqis, who had already been living in Italy, applied for a status as stateless, mainly because they did not have a permit of staying. Some were already recognized as immigrants, while others got the Italian citizenship after they had married with Italians. Only in the 1990s, the Italian Parliament approved the first

systematic regulations regarding aliens (*Law 39/90 – the Martelli Law*), with its terms and procedures for getting a refugee status on the basis of the Convention of Geneva. The Convention withdrew the geographical reserve that previously limited the recognition of the refugee status only to those people coming from Europe. As a consequence, every non-Italian could apply for an asylum independently from their own nationality and country of origin.

Italy signed the Convention of Genève late...it was an anti-Soviet position...for the geographical limit they did not welcome us. When they took away my passport, I could not apply for a refugee status...and I ask for recognition as a stateless person. I got it for short time... then I got married and I got the Italian citizenship.
(Iraqi Arab man – Rome)

A consistent number of interviewed Iraqis criticized the work of the Iraqi Embassy in Rome during the years of the ex-regime, which penalized those who were not sympathizing with Saddam Hussein.

I always felt to be clandestine... even if I was never illegal. Many Iraqi people told lies. Many collaborated with the regime of Saddam because of money. Here the Embassy, in the 80's paid scholarships for all who had intention to study, asked candidates to register in the party (Baath). I would say that 95% of the people were with Saddam...not supporting him directly...but they were members of the party. I did not register, for example, and they treated me always so bad...I had always problem with my Iraqi passport...they did not want to renew it... I came from a town, in which the majority of the people were Shia and communists...
(Arab Iraqi man – Rome)

The case of Iraqi Kurds, demonstrated that most of them, particularly arrived after the Gulf wars, showed little interest in seeking asylum in Italy. They only considered Italy as a country of transit instead of a country of destination (Puggioni, 2005). Their personal project was not only to reach the most consisting Kurdish communities and families who have already settled in northern European countries, but also to live in a more adequate situation. Some

Kurdish people, in fact, were people that were deported from England, Germany and Sweden, back to Italy because of the Dublin Convention which gives responsibilities to the first country where they arrived and applied for asylum.

10 years ago I arrived in Italy, but I did not have anything yet. My life would be better if I were in Iraq now. My heart is there. I have a wife and a young child that I met, for the first time, 3 years ago, when I went back to Iraq. After I arrived in Italy for the first time, I moved later to Germany, then England...but now they deported me to Italy again, where I am still waiting for my asylum. My documents are not good...I do not understand the Italian law...I am not so good in Italian language either...Nobody cares about your story...
(Kurdish man – Rome)

Between 1999 and 2002, Kurdish Iraqis' requests prevailed, also in comparison with Kosovars and Turkish Kurds, in terms of asylum applications (Finotelli, 2006). In those years, most of the applications were practically dropped because of untraceableness of people. Moreover, the observatory committee (PNA) at the French border noted that that 70% of asylum seekers who cross the border illegally were of Kurdish-Iraqi and Kurdish-Turkish origin. In addition, the last Census (1 Jan 2003) confirmed 2.015 Iraqis in the national territory, out of 6000 people; also the limited number of Iraqis recognized in the amnesty⁶ in 1998 and 2003, strengthened the hypothesis that Kurdish people preferred to transit to other countries rather than to stay in Italy (ibid. 2006: 233). Probably, this attitude can be explained not only by the lack of control and mistrust in the Italian refugee system, but also with the existence of the more consolidated Kurdish communities in countries such as Germany, England and Sweden, etc.

Looking into the transnational dimension of Iraqis living in Rome, there are some cases concerning the development of a "*reverse transnationalism*" or "*the dark side of transnationalism*".

⁶ The amnesty is usually defined as a legal proceeding, issued by decree, which provides for the regularization of undocumented immigrants already living in the country.

This term is referred to the case in which a person is incapable of supporting oneself and asks for an external support from their relatives and friends back home or abroad. Specifically, this term is referred to the clandestine and deported Iraqis, who lived in Rome in a squatted building, run by "Ararat" a Kurdish association. The lack of security derived by their "condition", forced them to ask for support, basically money, back home or from relatives across Europe, for their basic needs such as city transportation, medicines, phone cards and sometimes food. This situation of "*reverse remittances*" is typical for Italy, where the process of refugee status recognition is still long, bureaucratic and precarious.

How can I live here without anything? In Italy I do not have anything. My parents send me money sometimes...you know...I hope, that when I got a job, I could send money to them.
(Kurdish man – Rome)

If I need something I call my elder brother who lives in England with his family. If I need money, a dress, medicines or something else he helps me. For example, I am now waiting for a mobile phone he sent me few days ago. It will arrive at the "Centro Astalli". It is a mobile with internet. I can take pictures and check emails.
(Kurdish man – Rome)

I do not have money at the moment. Yesterday, I called my brother who lives in Kurdistan and I asked him to send me money...I hope to receive them at the western union office soon.
(Kurdish man – Rome)

Al Ali (et al 2002) proposed the concept of "*transnational capabilities*" It depicts a situation in which refugees, negatively affected by financial instability and deficiency of the local language in the country of settlement, are forcibly engaged in transnational activities.

Political transnationalism developed according to time and the diverse ethnic groups. In 1980s, some Iraqi Arabs men who lived in the city of Rome set up *the league of democratic Iraqi artists, journalists and writers*. It was a league of about 50-60 people. It was basically a cultural organization that lately dealt also with the political problems caused by the dictatorship of

Saddam Hussein. The main office was in Beirut, with several other branches set up across Europe. They organized exhibitions, conferences and petition, collaborated with the Italian municipalities and other active organizations working in the field of human rights. The political activities allowed them to engage both with the country of origin and the country of settlement. However, at the beginning of 1991 the league's activity slowed down and disappeared completely in 2003. Some Iraqis moved abroad, others began to show depression for the everlasting conflict, others simply felt tired to pretend to be active. Political transnationalism collapsed because of the lack of new generations of Iraqis, also because of the inadequate sense of community among the same ethnic group. Moreover, new groups such as NGOs and other immigrant associations replaced their activities.

In the cases of Kurdish Iraqis, their transnational activities are managed particularly by the PUK (the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), and the UIKI-ONLUS (information office of Kurdistan). They have a strong network of Kurdish minority across Europe and Kurdistan. They also have power to lobby the national government and European institutions to seek attention for their cases. The interconnections between national, sub-national or even cross national units has expanded due to the process of globalization, new forms of communication and modern information technology.

Iraqis in Helsinki: *We are all refugees!*

Similar to Italy, Finland is a country in which immigration is regarded as a new phenomenon. Because of its history and peripheral geographical location, Finland has never had a preponderant immigration pressure (Sagne & Saksela, 2007). The trend was shifted at the

beginning of the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the admission in the European Union determined a new increased immigration policy to Finland, despite the economic crisis (Sagne & Saksela, 2007). High refugees quota, return immigration and labour immigration made the immigration issue and integration discussion more actual.

Within the legal framework, the new revisited Aliens Act (2004) and Integration Act (1999) generally defined the principles in immigration and refugees topics according to a top down approach, i.e. from the state to the municipality. The integration is encouraged through programs of language training especially at the local level. The importance in these programs is often on searching for employment for the immigrants. However, previous studies showed that the Finnish system is not immune from faults and discrepancies (Valtonen, 1999; Wahlbeck, 2002).

The restrictive number of quota refugees⁷ based on an agreement with UNHCR and approved every year by the Parliament is small in comparison with the other Nordic countries; the small quota is also valid for other refugees categories and family reunification. Furthermore, the number of those who got a refugee status is significantly lower than those who were granted a temporal permit of stay or so called "B statute" (Wahlbeck, 2002; Statistic Finland 2007).

As described previously in the Italian case, the Iraqi population and its characteristic according to the path of immigration shaped during time are presented in this article. After

⁷ The number of quota refugees is approved by the Parliament every year and it depends on the state budget.

that, the smooth change in immigration in Finland is presented. Also, some specific transnational activities diffused by Iraqis in the city of Helsinki are emphasized.

According to the collected samples, the first Iraqi people arrived at the beginning of the 1990s were refugees. All of them, mainly men, crossed the Iraqi border illegally, and then tried to find refuge in the nearby countries and applied for refuge through the UNHCR refugee *agency* especially from Jordan, Turkey, Iran and Syria. Most of the interviewees did not manifest any specific intention to go to Finland; others applied for asylum in Finland after their first application was rejected. Countries like US, U.K. Canada, Germany and Sweden were usually the most requested. Unlike Italy, most of the refugees were quota refugees through UNHCR, only a small number of people applied for an asylum at the border.

When they asked me if I wanted to go to Finland...I did not even know where Finland was...I wanted to go to Sweden, because I had some relatives there...Then I was accepted by Finland...

(Kurdish woman - Helsinki)

I didn't know anything about Finland...I didn't know where Finland exactly was. They told me that Finland was between Sweden and Russia and I said, "OK".

(Iraqi Arab man – Helsinki)

I was waiting for the French delegation; I wanted to go to France. I took some language classes of French before; I had some contact with artists in Belgium and France...but then the Finnish delegation chose me...I knew very little of Finland... In Iraq we imported Finnish wood. Then I knew Sibelius and that's all.

(Iraqi Arab man - Helsinki)

Most of the people that arrived in the 2000s started to follow the so called "immigration chains", responding to the families and friends' call.

I had some friends that were living here...so I was in contact with them. They told me that Finland was a good country to raise babies...

(Kurdish woman - Helsinki)

Moreover, violence and insecurity in Iraq, determined a situation in which Iraqis felt safer and more protected in Finland. In Iraqis' discussions, the idea of staying in Finland has been changed with time; some interviewees in fact have noticed how their stay became, almost unconsciously, more permanent than they previously thought. Finland is not considered to be an attractive country yet, but an easy and a fast solution for those who escaped from their country of origin.

Moreover, even if the Finnish immigration and the refugee policy could be improved with time, many problems still remain. For examples, scarce employment and discrimination, etc. It is seen still as treats for both Kurdish Iraqis and Iraqi Arabs.

Now I have a job...but I do not like it...A friend told me about this job...It is more for ladies. I am a cleaner...I asked Abdul (a friend who has been living in Helsinki since 1999) to help me to get another job. He always helps everybody. I cannot find a better job... because I do not speak the language... Maybe after 3, 4 years...
(Iraqi Arab man - Helsinki)

People can look at you because you look different. When someone came to me and said, "go home Muslim, *Perkele ulkomalainen*⁸..." I think he is a sick and crazy person. This is not racism for me...it is more discrimination.
(Iraqi Arab man - Helsinki)

In some accounts, since the economic integration is the main aim of the Finnish government, several Iraqis have underlined conditions in which Finnish people see them as possible competitors in the economic market:

I feel sometimes that Finnish people think we are here because of the job market. So, they think, we steal their jobs...Well, maybe as a Finnish I would think the same...But for refugees it is a bit different. During the regime of Saddam Hussein, we had lots of Egyptian people

⁸ Translated from Finnish to English, it would be: "Damn *foreigner!*"

came to work in Iraq...Then, when the job ended they went back to Egypt. But we are different we cannot go back...
(Iraqi Kurdish man – Helsinki)

Uhm...Finnish people are in a very good position in the market today, e.g. in the technologies...the weak point of Finland, maybe, because they are afraid to lose what they have gained. It is like someone who has lots of money in his hands, then he may think that all people around him want to take his money...I think that the Finnish nation is like this...
(Iraqi Arab Man - Helsinki)

Transnational connections seemed to be various and stronger in Helsinki than in Rome. For instance, transnational political action is more prevalent amongst Kurdish people than Arab Iraqis. However, it is usually a small minority, who has been previously active in the country of origin, continues to undertake regular actions in the country of settlement. Power is therefore reproduced across countries and location. In order to be successful, action has to be maintained, renewed, and reconstituted through network with the country of origin, across Europe and Finland. In particular, Kurdish men are more likely to participate in and lead ethnic political organizations that focus is in the country of origin such as PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and PKK (Kurdistan worker Party). Moreover, a new non-profit organization, CHAK (Centre of Halabja against Genocide and Anfalization of the Kurds) has become active in Helsinki since 2007 because of the deportations risks for some Kurdish Iraqis who got a temporal permit of stay or the so called "B – Statutes". This organization, grouped both men and women from different parts of Kurdistan who mainly are Kurds came from Iraq. The organization has clear objectives such as informing people about the Kurdish genocides and denouncing human rights abuses committed against the Kurdish population. CHAK was born in 2002 and it works through a constant communication between other CHAK s' affiliates in Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, Australia, Kurdistan, etc. They organize meeting, conferences and petitions, virtually exchange information through chat rooms, articles and blogs on the internet.

Kurdish Iraqi Women, on the contrary, act as a link between the Finnish and the Kurdish community in terms of cultural, education and job related actions with a more sized and limited scope. Ethnically based associations such as the Iraqi women associations, the Iraqi employment association and the Kurdish women network created a space of belonging, social networks where people feel at ease. They are supported by their own community and the city of Helsinki. Sometimes they are provided with financial aid.

Iraqi Arabs, on the contrary, are more active in the cultural sector. Some Iraqi artists established in 1997 the "European Union Migrant Artists' Network". It reunited Iraqis and other migrant artists who are living and working in Europe. The aim of this artist network is to facilitate the integration of Iraqi Arabs in the new country of settlement and help them get into the network. It organizes exhibitions, seminars, workshops and other cultural activities especially in a country like Finland, where limited visibility was perceived as a problem.

The economic transnationalism appears less visible because it is restrained to the private refugees' sphere as in the Italian cases. Moreover, in the past years, a mosque raised money for Islamic relief projects in Iraq. It dealt with every kind of support like water and sanitation, health, education and children assistance.

Defining home

Defining home in migration studies is not a simple task. Social scientists provided different significances to this term via psychological, socio-cultural, political and economical

perspectives. They also analyzed it at the individual, groups and state level (Al Ali, 2002). Moreover, debates on home generated confusion and misunderstanding when terms such as home, homeland, place, state or nation are erroneously considered as synonymous. In any case, it is widely accepted by Sociologists that to better understand the meaning of home, people have to be alienated from it (Rapport and Dawson, 1998).

In Sociology, traditional literature has shaped the concept of home according to three main perspectives: physical, social and cognitive ones. In the first case, home is coincided with the country of origin or a specific territory in which a homogeneous community, with a specific culture, lives and organizes itself to develop a peculiar identity and practices (Warner, 1994).

Klis *Van Der* & Karsten (2005) pointed out that home may be both as a spatial and a social place. The spatial place is composed of a physical unit or a house which is grounded in a geographical space, for instance, the birth place or the home country. On the other hand, the social place, the household, is the social construction, in which people who belong to the same family interact with each other. Home is therefore a place of identification defined in terms of social relationships (Fullilove, 1996). It is a place in which a set of practices, in a repetition of habitual social interactions are created and recreated (Rapport & Dawson, 1998:27).

Other social scientists preferred to analyze the concept of home via its cognitive perspective, and therefore associate it to pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security amongst parents, brothers and sisters, loved people (Sarup, 1994: 94), or nostalgia and longing for self and origin (Ray, 2000; Akhtar, 1999).

Recently, transnational studies have initiated a new debate on locating home in a new perspective arising from the view of a globalized world. Instead of regarding home as a stable, safe and physical center of the universe to where return to (Rapport & Dawson, 1998: 27), new studies highlighted how the notion of home becomes more and more mobile. The idea that people are encapsulated into demarcated territories with specific cultures is no longer suitable in the world in which people and borders move. Therefore home does not have a crystallized vision, but it can be extrapolated from a specific territory to others in which people experience special attachments and develop a specific identity. For instance, Habib (1996) considered her personal experience of Lebanese living in an exile, from which she argued that home changes over time and it is not only related to a geographical place. During her travels across different countries such as Greece, France, Cyprus and United States, she was able to find a bit of home in all of them. Also, Black (2002) explored the case of refugee from Bosnia-Herzegovina⁹ and argued that it should be more appropriate to articulate the *"concept"* of home with the *"concepts"* of home because home can be made, *re-made, imagined, remembered or desired; it can refer as much to beliefs, customs or traditions as physical places or buildings. But, in order to get its significance completely, people need to think about it as a concept in flux* (Black, 2002: 126).

According to these post-modern sensibilities, home can be defined as a process of living, remembering and creating constant points of reference across time and spaces. People may develop multiple homes across space and contemporarily be capable of living in these pluri-localities with their multiple identities (Al Ali & Koser, 2002; Rouse, 1991; Vertovec, 1999).

⁹ More than two million people were displaced from Bosnia because of war (1991-1995).

Therefore home becomes hyper localized and deterritorialized (Malkki, 1992; Massey, 1994), as transnational practices are facilitated by changes in technological communication and transport, reduce distances, disintegrate borders, condense cultures and hybridize identity (Rapport & Dawson, 1998; Glick Schiller & Basch, 1995). Migrants are able to travel back and forth across countries with different cultures and histories. They can communicate easily and quickly, thus maintain their social network (Levitt, 1998). They can start political, social and even economic connections with people back home.

But what are the implications of this new vision of home on people's life? For some social scientists, the tension between two societies, i.e. the society of origin and the society of settlement, are solved in a unique social field where people live and at the same time belong to, without creating any conflicts (Glick Schiller, 1992). On the other hand, Salih (2002) suggested that the migrants' life across two or more countries generates fragmentation and conflicting feelings such as confusion, sense of discontinuity and rupture that enforces a feeling of belonging to neither place. Even the nicest happenings such as summer holidays, weddings, celebrations and other special occasions became stressful and anxious (ibid). Mending home is usually a difficult task because people have to cope with psychological, emotional and traumatic situations (Webster, 1998).

In refugee studies, the sense of rupture, especially the one caused from a forced displacement, may encourage people to embrace a special meaning of home, where home is more invented than real (Malkki, 1992) especially after living far away from it for a long time.

Moreover, the number of people under situations of being deterritorialized and displaced happens to increase everyday (Al Ali & Koser, 2002). The sensation of being deterritorialized and alienated may also be perceived in the home country. As Cohen (1995) stated out, people who went through social exclusion in their home country may still refer the place as their home. This idea engaged with a further discussion about the diaspora discourse, with reference to those migrants whose identity is constructed through more than one place.

Home in Iraqis accounts

In this chapter, the way the Iraqis handled the concept of home is explained, for both Arabs and Kurdish people living in Helsinki and Rome. In particular, the following specific questions are answered:

1. How home is described?
2. How is it remembered?
3. Where is it located?

Moreover, by considering the variation of Iraqi responses in terms of attachment and belonging, four ideal types through which explain the results of various perceptions of home among Iraqis are identified.

The meaning of home to Iraqis does not have a homogeneous significance, while it provided a sense of identity to people (Jansen, 1998). From Iraqis' accounts, home is summarily described as a cognitive, social and physical place. Generally, the description of home coincides with the remembrance of the city in where people were born, and also the land

and rivers, e.g. Tigris and Euphrates, and stories about childhood and the family, the period of socializations at schools and universities, etc. On the other hand, it can be defined in a more abstract way as a place characterized by security and peace, in contraposition to the present situation in Iraq.

Iraq is the place where I was born, it is my land, I ate from that land and I drank its water...
(Iraqi Arab man - Helsinki)

My home is in Iraq where my people are. The place...that place where there are many problems now... I remember the rivers...in the past they were very beautiful; now they are full of blood...now it is all red! It is blood...When I was young I used to swim in those rivers...yes! Red, it's red, now!
(Iraqi Arab man - Helsinki)

Home means life and family, peace, where we can take care of kids that can grow up in a normal situation...
(Iraqi Kurdish woman -Helsinki)

I was born in Kirkut. All my childhood and my first experiences are linked to that place, soil... How could I forget my home country? Italy is just a place, where at the moment I am staying. Here there are no bombs that explode or women and children being killed as in Iraq. Even if in Italy there is no work and it is not so nice to stay...it is always better, because I feel at least secure...Maybe home means this?
(Iraqi Kurdish man – Rome)

It is obviously evident that home is basically defined through a process of construction and deconstruction. Therefore, a positive connotation of home manifests itself in opposition to war, pain and destruction as a notion to return to the normality, safety and security of a family life. The sense of rupture between the "golden age of the past" and the "current present misfortune", appears in all Iraqis discussions, without distinction of ethnicity, but with different emphasis among those people who have been personally persecuted both directly or indirectly.

However, the location of home determined different categories of people grouped in four ideal types, as presented below:

a) Homeless people at home

There are cases which people felt to be homeless at home, and this state of homelessness was part of the individual even before the exile. People, especially Kurdish and some Shia Arabs, were suffering a lot from the regime of Saddam Hussein since the 1970s. Therefore, some of them have developed a consequential attachment to the country where they settled, where their civil and human rights were respected and widely recognized.

Finland is my home, because what I can do what I want to do...In Iraq it was not possible... I can study here! In Iraq I was a Kurdish woman and I could not do it...In Iran I was not an Iranian and I could not do anything...In Finland I can, I am free to decide what I want to do and I can do it!
(Iraqi Kurdish woman -Helsinki)

b) People with dual loyalty

It is referred to a situation of dual identity or *dual loyalty* to their country of origin and to the country of settlement created by a prolonged time of residence in both countries (Smith, 2007). The development of multiple location and contexts challenges definitions such as home and nation-state which appeared to be fluid, multifaceted and sometimes confused.

Kerava (a suburb in Helsinki) is my home....I am a "Keravalinen Iraqista", a "person who lives in Kerava but came from Iraq". They belong together...Home is peace...where I find a peaceful place, where I find my home; it is not my sentence...The cousin of the Prophet Mohammad, Ali, said that "your country is the place that carries you (takes care) in peace". Where the peace is, that is my country and Finland gave me this (...) but I am also proud to be an Iraqi...I am proud that I am from a Gilgamesh town.
(Iraqi Arab man- Helsinki)

I spent my childhood and youth in Iraq, then a nice time in Rome...I do not want to talk about Italy, but Rome, because I do not know Italy very well...I feel today I'm divided by these two countries: one as the memory, the past, to which I have an ethic duty, my home country...and another one...where I spend my current life with friends and family. It is a way of saying that" The place to where you belong, it is the country of your family cemeteries" ...for me it is between Bagdad and Bassora...in the south of Iraq, and also in Rome for my wife's side. I live in tension between these two countries...I am between sky and earth...
(Iraqi Arab Man – Rome)

The length of time of permanence in the country of settlement is not the only key to clarify how the double loyalty is perceived. The previous life in the country of origin and the motivations of leaving their country are also perspectives to reflect on. What keeps their home alive? Apart from the possibility to visit the home country during the exile, it is the capability to stay in contact with their households and friends, virtually and/ physically during the years (Sherrell and Hyndman, 2003). People continue to live across borders. Phone calls, letters, email, Internet messaging services, online newspapers, etc. facilitate the Iraqis to keep in touch with others back home and abroad.

c) The homesickers

This ideal type is referred to those Iraqis who maintain, during the exile, a particular attachment to the country of origin. Some of them felt guilty because they assumed that they did not help their people back home enough, or they felt themselves lucky while others are constantly dying in Iraq. Others expressed their strong feelings to go back to the past, when they referred to their current situation in the country of settlement, characterized by isolation and dissatisfaction. The return was postponed and then prohibited. As time goes on, the desire to return to the country of origin became stronger. As a consequence, home is more idealized and mythologized than the reality, especially in the accounts of those refugees who

have been away for more than a decade. Therefore, their relation with the home country could be explained as **a sort of moral commitment that it will be fulfilled** when the emigrant is reunited again with his/her home country and people.

Iraq is my home; I was always thinking, no matter what, not to move out of Iraq, but something happened... (...).I like this country (Finland), but it is not my country. I like my country more...(..) I do not think for myself here, I do not go out...All the time I think that if something nice is coming...(pause) I would not sleep afterwards! Because then I think how bad Iraq is now...how people live badly....and I would feel bad of myself...
(Iraqi Arab Man – Helsinki)

At the beginning, you had to escape, you had to save yourself...but when you were 18/20 years old, you had many projects and dreams about your life...only after a while you realized this sense of guilty. You felt to be a betrayer, and what you did not understand was why you must be saved, while others went down and died. Why did I have this privilege? (...) I hope to conclude the interlude of life...and go back to my country...because, sincerely, I am scared to get old and die in this country.
(Iraqi Arab Man – Rome)

d) People finding home in Diaspora

The last ideal type is referred to the Kurdish “organized” people living in Diaspora. Diaspora disrupts the apparent closure of home, produces transnational/translocal connections and communities, and reproduces home in a global frame (Wahlbeck 2002). The Kurdish example demonstrated how the alternative ethnic or religious identities can be flourished in the Diaspora, away from the state controls on language use, religious practice and political expressions (Adamson, 2000:162). Home becomes a transnational space recreated by the transnational community. It fills the gap between the country of settlement and the country of origin.

However, an inevitable problem, arisen from the interviews, is the definition of “home country”. The variation in the meaning of home is mainly dependent on ethnic identity. For instance, in the case of Kurdish Iraqis, it is important to stress that ethnical identity is not exactly linked to national identities. Therefore, in the interviews especially with Kurdish Iraqis, words such as Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Mesopotamia were preferred to the word Iraq. The reason of this peculiar specification is clearly patriotic and political, especially for those people who are active *in primis* in the political arena. Sometimes, Kurdistan and Iraq, geographically speaking, appeared to be the confused ones.

I came from Kurdistan...I came from that culture, so old. I am today as I am, because of that culture. It was a really beautiful country, very different from the north to the south...the nature, the people...I am really sorry about the politics. Wars and the ex-regime destroyed everything...Speaking truly, I am not anymore nostalgic about my country, my home country...and many people, in Rome, do not understand why. I think that it is because of the pain and sufferance I had in Iraq. (...) If a country treats you badly, how can you love it? I lost many school friends...I think that even if I go back there and look at those places...places that had in the past a meaning, because of the persons I lost...they would be different. Now, if I go back there, I feel painful, because there are no reasons that the place has taken away the persons that once I loved....

(Iraqi Kurdish man- Rome)

I am Kurdi Iraqi but from Kurdistan...

(Iraqi Kurdish man – Helsinki)

Another important element provided by the interviewees was the Iraqis specific attachment to the town where they were born or lived. *Tribal loyalty* manifested itself through the description of the city or town and its histories, accounts for families and their traditions. Tribal loyalty reconnects people with their lands. It provides not only social identity and sense of belonging, but also supports security in terms of social, political and economic system.

In short, in Iraqis accounts, home is described as a cognitive, social and physical place indifferent from their ethnic belonging. Usually home brings a contrasting vision between the past which is characterized by childhood, happy families, and special places, etc., and the present. The description of home and how home is remembered drives also to a further discussion about where it is located. In this regard, four categories of Iraqis were presented. In the first category, people, who have been living in Italy and Finland for more than 10 years, developed a dual belonging which seems also to be dependent on their possibilities to visit the home country during the exile and the constant communication across time and space. In the second category, people who suffered for ethnic and political persecution, the Arabs and the Kurdish indifferently, found home in the country of settlement despite all the difficulties. The feeling of being homeless at home, even before the exile is a constant variable in their stories. In the third category, people who suffered for a sense of guilty and alienation in the country of settlement developed a subjective attachment to the country of origin. In the last category, people who are living in Diaspora, in particular the Kurdish Iraqis created a transnational home shaped by transnational networks which span over the globe across national borders. This vision embraced an understanding of home built as transnational reality, filling the gap between the country of settlement and the country of origin.

Conclusions

In this paper, the way how the concept of the myth of return, embedded in the transnational frame, could be helpful for clearing up dynamics of migrants' inclusion/exclusion in the

society of settlement is highlighted. The concept, linking the past and the present life of the migrants, clarified how belonging and meaning of home are constructed by Iraqis in two diverse cities in Helsinki and Rome. Moreover, it could be helpful in the analysis of integration issues.

The myth of return brought with itself the idea or the desire of going back to the point of departure. Desiring “something” usually induces imagination that “something” could happen. Therefore, imagination and memory play an important role, because it mobilizes action and energy at the personal and the group level. People are not passive thinkers but they may be constantly in contact with their people all around the globe (Appadurai, 1996). Therefore, home is a fluid concept which is constantly changing, through the multiple encounters according to time and previous life in the country of origin. Four ideal types have been constructed in order to specify Iraqis’ home affiliation. The analysis of home and its variations brought also interesting information about the kind the cross-border ties and the transnational activities developed by both Iraqi groups during these years. Furthermore, both the city and the heterogeneity within the same ethnic group are the central features for explaining the power and the variation of transnational activities.

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