Arab-German Remigration

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The post 9/11 discourses of public discussion and academic research on Arab migration and integration in the European countries have been dominated, on the one hand, by processes of "Islamization" of the migrants' communities. On the other hand, security, terrorism and crime issues and socio-spatial segregation patterns are pushing for further alienation and isolation of larger segments of Arab migrants. The theoretical framing of these discourses has been delivered by various post-modern approaches of different shapes and colours; transnational, networking, multicultural, post-conflict, diaspora, gender, as well as other approaches. The major focus of these approaches is again the dynamics of the migrants' communities in the host countries. Few innovative works have discussed the issues of remigration and the political aspects of emigration for the Arab countries.[1]

The number of people of Arab origin living in Germany is hard to estimate. Numbers between 280,000 and 400,000 have been mentioned on various occasions and in various resources. The numbers include holders of nationalities of Arab countries, naturalized Arabs, holders of dual citizenships, and stateless Arabs. The majority is of Moroccan, Tunisian, Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi origins. The different histories of migration of various Arab communities are reflections of the socio-economic and political histories of their original homelands; the Moroccans and Tunisians are descendants of the labour migrants (*Gastarbeiter*) that came to Germany on the basis of bilateral governmental agreements; the Palestinians, the Iraqis, and the Lebanese came for the most part as political refugees; considerable number of Syrian and Palestinian Arabs came to Germany for study and never left.

Histories of collective and individual immigrations find their expressions in various patterns of integration and daily-life practices. Integration is mainly a local phenomenon. Integration processes take place in the living quarter, at work, in school, in public spaces, and venues, etc. People integrate primarily on the micro level before achieving a national (macro) level of integration.[2]

Types of remigration

A variety of parameters can be used to identify specific categories of returned migrants. In the case of Arab returning migrants from Germany a mixture of the motivations to leave Germany and the expectations in the in-bound Arab countries delivers a comprehensive tool to analyze the dynamics of return and the aspects of interaction between societies, economies, and cultures. There are five major types of returned migrants: Elderly remigration, career remigration, forced remigration, political remigration, and social conservative remigration. Beyond these groups, other types of motivations and expectations have been identified (lifestyle motivations, medical needs, familial reasons, etc.) though due to their individual characters and small numbers could not be clustered in groups.

To the type of elderly remigration belong elderly people that are on pensions and/or not of a working age anymore. These are mainly former Gastarbeiter from Tunisia and Morocco that are expecting better standards of life in their original homelands and have rather weak family ties in Germany. There are no exact numbers of these returnees, because they often are still nominally registered in Germany within the households of their children. By doing this they keep a postal address in Germany through which they deal with the authorities responsible for pension payments and health insurance.

This article discusses the remigration of Arab families formerly living in Germany, as well as the possible causes and effects of remigration. For several families, especially those with daughters, social and cultural reasons turn out to be the most important motivation for leaving Germany. Concerned that they will be unable to protect the family honour within a German setting, these families decided to move back to an Arab country where they hope to find a social environment that shares their moral concerns.

Career remigration is taking place among highly qualified young people who are taking advantage of their bi-lingual, bi-national, and bi-cultural backgrounds. They belong mainly to the second and the third generations of migrants as well as naturalized former students (first generation) that see better career chances in the Arab countries than in Germany. They consider their career chances in Germany limited in general, due to their migratory background. The policies of economic liberalization and globalization going on in many Arab countries, but especially in the rich Gulf Arab countries, give them a chance to realize themselves as mediators and brokers between German-speaking countries and companies from one side, and Arab businesses and markets on the other side. According to different estimations by the German Business Chambers and the German-Arab Trade Chambers their number in 2007 reached 2000-2500 people.

Then there is forced remigration of people that lose their residential permits for one reason or another (students, criminals with no German citizenship, rejected asylum seekers). There are exact numbers available by various German official authorities, but it is practically very difficult to have access to them because they are gathered on state by-state base and not on the federal level. According to the numbers available by the Auslaenderamt in the city of Wiesbaden (State of Hess), around 350 persons of Arab origin lost their residential permits in Hess in the year 2007 down from 400 persons in 2006.

Political remigration relates to Arab political refugees who voluntarily return to their homelands. Iraqis (Kurds and Arabs) make the main group of this type. In the last five years many Arab political refugees from Mauritania, Algeria, and Bahrain returned to their home countries due to improvements in the political situations. Numbers of the returnees are very roughly estimated and cannot be used for further research. Social conservative remigration, finally, concerns the remigration of families with children that decide to live in an Arab country due to socio-cultural conflicts in Germany. These are mainly conservative and better-off families with young children that can easily find good-paying jobs in an Arab country.

Lack of integration

A case study of twenty returned families of Jordanian, Palestinian, and Syrian origin pointed out that the most two important motivations of return, according to the returnees themselves, are the lack of social integration in the living neighbourhood and the wish to raise their daughters in a traditional Arab social environment. The process of measurement of the levels of integration was left to the personal perception of the heads of the households (mother and father) involved in the case study, who themselves described their situation as "less-integrated" or "non-integrated." The traditional Arab social environment is outlined by the heads of the families as a society where "Arab family and religious values and traditions prevail, where solidarity and honour still have a meaning, and where individual freedoms do not clash with the norms of the family, the society, and the religion."

The returned families belong to the educated upper-middle class. All of the male heads of the families (the fathers) hold university degrees (physicians, engineers, IT specialists, brokers, solicitors, etc.). Thirteen families are Arab-German bi-national families and seventeen fathers have a German citizenship while the other three have a permanent residency. All of them used to live in well-off neighbourhoods dominated by native German population. All the families have at least one pre-

teenage daughter. It is indeed note-worthy that all the families that mentioned the socio-cultural conflicts in Germany as the major reason for return have at least one daughter (eighteen of the families have two or more daughters). Families with only male children did not mention in a single case the socio-cultural conflicts as a major or as an important reason for return. Thus only families with daughters indicated that socio-cultural conflicts a the motivation for leaving Germany.

The conflicts of daily life as a conservative Arab in a German liberal neighbourhood, especially for the female members of the family, were always mentioned by the fathers and the mothers as "the problem"; Islamic dress code (headscarf) was openly not accepted by the majority neither at school nor on the streets; the daughters' avoiding of the gender-mixed physical and out-door school activities was not accepted by the school administration. The integration processes on the local level obviously failed. These families did not want to move into the so called foreigners' quarters dominated by disadvantaged segments of population

PHOTO BY ALA AL-HAMARNEH, 2008

Returned migrants picnic in Dubai.

and where the traditional conservative Arab way of life is present in public spaces and generally accepted (partially dominated). The heads of the families were well aware that they do not belong economically, socially, and intellectually to the disadvantaged quarters with their multiple problems. They were looking for good and safe quarters.

Looking for belonging

The decision to live in an Arab country is not the classical return to the original homelands. Of sixty percent of the families in the study four chose to live in Qatar and eight in the UAE. It is interesting to notice that only one family chose the fashionable Dubai as a place of living, while the others chose the more conservative Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Ras Al-Khaima. Three families of Palestinian origin decided to go to Jordan and not to the original homeland of Palestine/occupied West Bank.[3] It is remarkable that two of the returned families are re-born Christians who keep a very conservative and religious way of life (no alcohol, no smoking, no gender-mixed activities, and for children, partially no TV watching and no Internet).

The high expectations to find a social conservative space to raise the children, especially the girls, have been mentioned by fathers and mothers as well. The parents accept the traditional interpretation of family honour as honour defined through female bodies and sexual behaviour. In this context, the sexual behaviour and the individual freedom of the female members of the families have to be controlled to protect and save the family honour (the male honour as well). The issue of male homosexuality has been tackled by seven of the families who mentioned the problem of raising boys in liberal societies, where gayness is accepted and publicly addressed, as encouraging gay activities. All the families see the Arab-Islamic societies as conservative traditional social societies where children can be better raised and controlled than in the liberal German society.

The influence of these returned migrants in the local communities in Jordan, Syria, Qatar, and the UAE is crucial. Under local communities is included extended families, colleagues, friends, and neighbours. In addition to their educational and economical status, their bi-national character as well allows these returned migrant families to enjoy a high social respect and gain even a solid "reference" rank on European matters and Western cultural issues. During my field research, they were pointed out by their friends and colleagues as pioneers and experts in the context of lifestyles, ideas, and behaviour. By exemplifying the experiences of integration and return of these families various anti-liberal personalities and groups in the local communities construct an amoral and xenophobic image of the German (read Western and European)

society and use this return as an argumentation in the discussions with the liberal members of the very same community.

The heads of the returned families have never been engaged directly in political activities in Germany and were rather apolitical personalities according to their own expressions. Especially their attitudes towards the Arab diasporic communities and the Arab states have always been politically ambivalent; they were not active in host countries' Arab political organizations and activities. Their leitmotifs for social actions and articulations are embedded in their conservative cultural and religious lifestyles.

Despite their tranquil socio-political activities in Germany,[4] they are today seen as some kind of icon for the anti-liberal local Arab activists. However, the impact of the constructed "occidental" images of the Western societies is still rather locally limited since the number of such returnees from Germany is small. Taking into account the possible return of numerous social conservative migrants from other European and American countries, their social influence and political role could rapidly grow and may reach beyond the local circle of friends, families, and colleagues. The globalization and internationalization of higher education and health sectors as well as the development of new economies in many Arab countries may, on the one hand, open many career chances for Arab experts-migrants and, on the other hand, deepen the conflicts inside each Arab society between liberal and anti-liberal social movements on issues of individual freedoms, especially female and sexual freedoms, as well as values, traditions, and liberal styles of raising children.

Notes

1. See Jean-Pierre Cassarino, *Theorising Return Migration: a revisited conceptual approach to return migrants*, EUI Working Papers, RSCAS, no. 2 (2004); Laurie Brand, *Citizens Abroad. State and Emigration in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

2. See Nadia Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (London: Routledge, 2002).

3. Of course the political situation in Palestine contributed strongly to the decision to go to Jordan.

4. For more information on the life of Muslims and Arabs in Germany, see Ala Al-Hamarneh and Jörn Thielmann, *Islam and Muslims in Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

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